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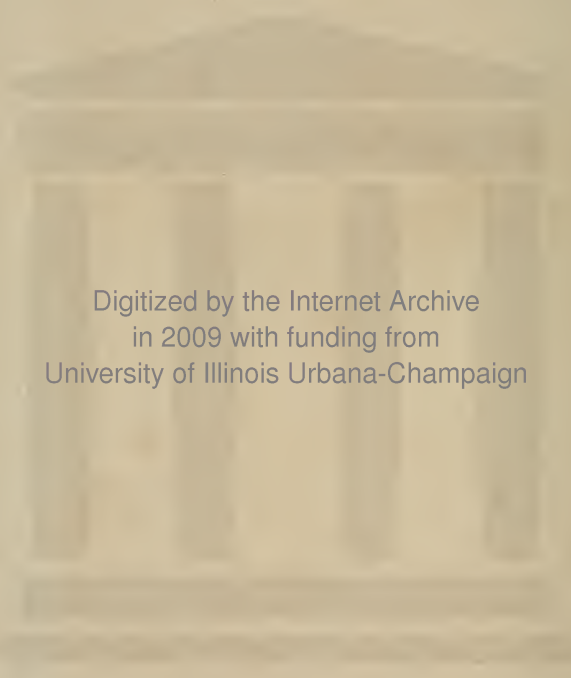
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THE
OLD ENGLISH GENTLEMAN,

OR,
THE FIELDS AND THE WOODS.

BY
JOHN MILLS, ESQ.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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THE
OLD ENGLISH GENTLEMAN.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE HUNTSMAN'S WEDDING.

“ Methinks, a father
Is, at the nuptial of his son, a guest
That best becomes the table——.”

A THIN crust of snow covered the ground, just permitting the points of the grass to peep above its surface, as the old whipper-in strode from his cottage door towards the Hall. A keen wind nipped his nose, and benumbed his fingers, each step crisping under his tread, as he bustled along. Scarcely a cloud was visible, but the rays of the sun were pale,

and gave little warmth to the bleached earth. Myriads of sparkling gems danced and flashed in the light. Flocks of chilled birds covered the thorns, and pecked the red berries for want of more dainty fare. The robin perched himself upon the leafless bough, and whistled his winter song. It was Christmas morning—a bright, cold, bracing day.

“ Ah ! ” exclaimed Mr. Bolton, “ here’s a day for Will’s throw off. All things in season’s my motto. Hot weather for haymaking ; southerly winds and cloudy skies for fox-hunting ; snow and frost for matrimony. Hot days don’t suit the con-nubial start. They put the parties out of condition.”

The church clock had just struck ten, when the bells rung a joyous peal. Far away in the clear, frosty air the sounds were borne. Through wood and vale, far and wide, the merry din announced the huntsman’s wedding.

Along the path, leading from the church to the Hall, returned the bridal party. William and his bride walked in advance, followed

by Kate and Agnes, who, by their own desire, acted as bridesmaids. The squire and Mr. Bolton succeeded them. The curate, Wil-mott, and Titley, followed. Then came thirty of the squire's friends, who regularly joined the hounds, all dressed in scarlet, and equipped for the chase. The rear was brought up by Peter Bumstead, Jack Tiggles, and the rest of the domestics.

"Now then," said the squire, entering the servants' hall, "let us have the bowl."

In a few minutes a large, old-fashioned china bowl was brought in by the butler. To the brim it was filled with spiced wine, which sent a fragrant steam to the ceiling. Roasted apples hissed and floated in the capacious vessel, and a large ladle was buried within an inch of the fawn-foot handle in its contents.

"Glasses all round," ordered the squire. "Now fill away," continued he, setting the example.

In a short period all were charged.

"Here's health, long life, and happiness to William Bolton and his pretty wife," said

the squire, in a loud voice, and emptying his goblet.

The toast met with an enthusiastic reception. Each seemed desirous to evince the sincerity of his feelings, as the glass to friendship was raised and quaffed. Rough but honest grasps were exchanged; hearts beat quick and light; and not one in that merry company felt a throb of envy, jealousy, or malice.

In the artificial scenes of more refined society, on the freezing stage where Fashion's starched and hollow form frets her hour, how different the springs of action! The honeyed word, garnished with smiles, drops from tongues steeped in slander's gall; the glance of seeming sympathy and kindness, from eyes of the basilisk's temper. Hypocrisy lurks in every gesture of the puppet crowd, and yet each actor thinks *his* mask impenetrable. The aim of society is to deceive, by assuming a garb not suited to the shape beneath. How many breasts would cease to sigh if the fetters of dissimulation were broken! Self-respect, that

most enviable of all feelings, would reign paramount, and fair honesty be the root for fair deeds to grow from.

“ Now, William Bolton, my son,” said Tom, after all had drained their glasses, “ tip ’em a virgin o-ration — parliament folks call ’em maiden speeches ; *I* call ’em virgin o-rations.”

Will scraped the sand from the white bricks, unbuttoned his breeches pockets, rebuttoned them, and exhibited signs of some confusion.

“ Put ’em at it, Will,” said Tom, encouragingly.

“ I’m at fault, governor,” replied Will, “ but here goes for a blind un. My good master, gentlemen o’ the hunt, and friends—”

“ Stop, Will,” said Tom ; “ you should have placed *me* after the gentlemen o’ the hunt. Never put your father in the ruck, my boy—he’s a leader.”

“ Beg your pardon, governor,” rejoined Will, smiling. “ I feel as if I was pounded. However, I must try to get across country. The kindness we—that is, my little wife here, and myself—have met with from all present,

is a great deal too much for me to talk about. I feel it here," said William, placing his hand upon his heart, " but something in my throat is so large that I can't give it room."

" He can't swallow it, you see," suggested Mr. Bolton, with a serious face.

There was much difficulty in concealing the mirth caused by the old whipper-in's attempted assistance. William made a long pause to regain a becoming gravity, and Fanny, who leaned upon his arm, hid her merry face behind her husband's shoulder. At last, Will, as if at his wit's end, burst out with a loud voice, made musical by the feeling that spoke in it : — " From my soul I thank ye ; and may God bless you all ! and that's all I can say."

Vociferous cheering followed the huntsman's brief speech. All the assembly shook hands with him, and many enjoyed the privilege of saluting the bride under the huge miseltoe. Among the candidates for this privilege was Jack Tiggie, who unceremoniously snatched a kiss, and at the same time winked his left eye at the gamekeeper.

“That was a sweet un, that was, Mr. Bumstead,” said he, approaching Peter.

“I know what you’d get if she was a wife of mine,” replied Peter, sulkily.

“Liberty to do so at my pleasure, no doubt,” rejoined Jack.

A few hours passed gaily enough, when the dinner-bell boomed forth the welcome tidings of the prepared meal. At the head of one of three long tables, groaning under the weight of its substantial dishes, sat the squire. On each side of him were the ladies; Wilmott was at the bottom, with the curate and his friend Titley flanking him right and left. William sat at the head of another board, having his wife on one side of him, and his father on the other. At the remaining table were Peter, with his evil genius, Jack Tiggles, close to his side, and old Striver acting as vice-president. The gentlemen of the hunt, with the Scourfield tenantry, were seated at the squire’s table. The domestics and William’s invited guests placed themselves as it suited their inclinations at the others.

After a brief but suitable blessing from the curate, off flew the bright covers, and for a few moments the fragrant steam enveloped the company, as if a thick fog had suddenly forced itself through the chinks of the floor. Then such a clatter of knives, forks, and plates rung through the hall! Barons of beef dwindled from their huge dimensions, like snow in the bright sunshine; plump capons became mere shadows of their former greatness; and at length the disappearance of haunches of fat venison, pheasants, hares, turkeys, with some large solid plum-puddings, announced the conclusion of the feast.

The choicest wine from the vast cellars was brought in by the gouty butler. Magnums of rosy port, faded from its pristine colour by time, and round which the spider had twined his clinging web in days long past, were dug from their sawdust grave. Madeira, bright as keen wit, gurgled from the disgorging bottle, and bowls of odoriferous punch stood creaming at convenient distances.

After the squire had pledged the whole of

the company, and many a loyal and patriotic toast had been given, "Clear away for the dance," said he; "heap more logs on the fire, and tune up your fiddle, Striver."

In a few moments chairs and tables were stowed away, and Striver, mounted on one of them in a corner of the room, commenced scraping a merry tune. On each side ranged the company, and, with the light step of boyhood, the squire led off the country-dance with the bride. Down the middle and up again, they tripped to the inspiring strain from Striver's bow.

To Mr. Bolton's indescribable surprise and gratification, Kate challenged him to dance with her. Tom's eyes glistened as his graceful young mistress gave him her hand to join in the "fantastic dance."

"Spring and winter," growled Peter, as a slight pang of envy shot through his breast.

The observation was not lost upon Mr. Bolton, who, with a look of mingled indignation and pride, gave a hazardous flourish to

lead off his fair partner with, and to prove the springy capacity of his heels.

“Capital, capital!” hallooed the squire, delighted to see Tom’s successful attempt “to poise in air, and measure to the sound.”

Dance after dance, and reel after reel, succeeded each other, till at length fatigue began to display itself, not only in the wearied votaries of Terpsychore, but also in old Striver’s digits.

“Keep it up,” cried Tom. “For’ard, for’ard; we’re not run into yet.”

And his white top-boots skipped up and down with the speed of a much younger man, as he set in a quick reel to Fanny.

“But I,” said Striver, dropping his fiddle, “am trapped with the fore pads.”

“Then we’re checked,” replied Tom, coming to a stand.

“Check-mated,” added the curate, dwelling upon his favourite game.

“Why don’t you dance, Peter?” inquired Wilmott.

“Ah, sir! that’s what I want to know,”

said Jack Tiggles; "I've been asking him all the evening. I'm quite ——."

Jack's speech was cut short by a tumultuous peal of laughter bursting from his lips.

Peter eyed Jack with a penetrating look; and, after an instant's reflection, slapped his leg with his broad hand, and exclaimed, "I thought there was something wrong!—Thunder and lightning!" and off went Peter, with an awkward gait, out of the hall, muttering rough oaths.

"What's the matter?" asked the squire.

"I don't know," replied Wilmott. "But I think Jack has been playing one of his tricks upon Peter."

Jack had nearly succeeded in getting out of the hall unobserved, when the squire, seeing him sneaking away, called him back.

"What have you been doing?" inquired he, seizing Jack by the ear.

"Nothing, sir," squealed Jack; a usual reply with him when interrogated respecting his misdeeds.

"Tell me," added the squire, giving him a pinch.

“Oh, oh, oh!” squeaked Jack. “I will, sir, if you please.”

The company formed a group round the mischievous Jack Tiggles, anticipating, with pleasure, the adventure to be related.

“If you please, sir,” commenced he, with an humble voice and supplicating manner, “Mr. Bumstead has a favourite shirt.”

“A *what?*” said the squire.

“A favourite shirt, with a ruffle in front, sir,” replied Jack.

“Well! go on,” said the squire.

“Mr. Bumstead,” continued Jack, “thinks nobody can fig out the frill like my mother can. And so, when he means to sport his favourite shirt, he gets my mother to wash and iron it for him. The night before last, I saw what pains she took with it, and, after it was done, she asked me to take it home.” Jack faltered here, and hesitated to go on. “You won’t be angry with me, sir?” said he, interrogatively.

“Perhaps not,” replied the squire, longing to hear the result.

“There was a spoonful or two of starch left in a cup,” continued Jack, “which I took away with me when mother gave me the shirt; and, before I got to Mr. Bumstead’s house, I — I ——”

“Well, well! what did you?” asked his master, with impatience.

“I starched the tail!” replied Jack.

The men haw-hawed, and the females hung their heads and tittered, as Jack finished the account of his trick. The squire gave him a gentle slap on the shoulders, which had in it more of approbation than reproof, and laughed for several minutes. Mr. Bolton was equally pleased, and repeated his belief of “an unruly whelp making a good, steady hound.”

The night waned, and, as the majority appeared tired with dancing, it was proposed that Mr. Bolton should relate a story. It should be observed, that Tom was noted for being a first-rate teller of a story.

Forming a ring round the cheerful wood fire — and a very wide one it was — all were silent for the old whipper-in’s tale. With a

dignified air, Mr. Bolton seated himself in the centre, and, after sipping a small quantity of punch, he drew a silk handkerchief across his lips, and said he would relate a simple fact, which took place when he was a boy :—

“Five and thirty years ago, there was a maiden lady, of an uncertain age (for the mark was out of her tooth,” said Tom, by way of parenthesis), “living within five miles of the market-town of Highbridge. Nature had not been over-bountiful to her with regard to female charms, considering she had nothing good but her legs; but these were clippers. Her hair was thin and red. One of her eyes looked up the chimney, while the other squinted in the pot. Her teeth were always taking liberties with her lips; and as to her mouth, it almost swallowed up the rest of her face. In short, she had no good points but her legs, and they, as I said afore, were clippers.

“It is not very surprising, therefore, that this lady was exceedingly proud of the only attractions she possessed. They say women

are vainer than men. How that may be I can't say ; but I know this lady would stand the whole live-long day before a looking-glass, to admire her legs ; and I never heard of a man being quite so vain as that. ' It's a lamentable thing,' thought Miss Bebee, which was her name, ' that I can't wear tights ; for where's the use of possessing such treasures, without the opportunity of displaying them ?' This she had repeated to herself during many successive years, on every occasion when she admired her legs—which was daily. She always walked in the most public roads when the wind blew strong, hoping a sudden gust might cause her charms to be known and appreciated, without the commission of any impropriety on her part. Through the mud she tramped, holding her dress well up, for the same purpose. But whether their complexion was so changed from the mire that they were unrecognised, or that dame Fortune was perverse, and wouldn't favour the design, I can't say ; but years rolled on, and no one was a bidder for possession of the only handsome features of Miss Bebee's person.

“ Now, it so happened, one morning in January—much such a day as this—a fine, dry, frosty day—that Miss Bebee, after a hasty glance at her legs in the glass, entered a bright yellow po’-chaise to go to Highbridge. It was market-day; and, as Miss Bebee jolted along, and saw the ruddy faces, the top-boots, and gilt-buttoned coats of the farmers journeying to Highbridge, serious thoughts flitted through her brain, as to whether or not it would be proper and expedient for her to stick a leg out of each front window of the po’-chaise, to attract the attention of the passers-by. This, however, she abstained from doing, reserving the show-off for her arrival.

“ ‘ Drive to the market-hill,’ said Miss Bebee to her driver, an old, deaf postboy.

“ ‘ Where, marm?’ asked the old postboy.

“ ‘ To the market-hill,’ screamed Miss Bebee.

“ ‘ I can’t hear,’ replied the driver.

“ ‘ To the market-hill,’ again screeched Miss Bebee.

“ ‘ I must get down fust,’ rejoined the old

postboy, getting off his horse, and limping to the door of the chaise.

“Miss Bebee never permitted an opportunity to be lost for a display ; and, as the driver tugged at the rusty handle, she placed her legs in an attractive position.

“ ‘Where did you say, marm?’ inquired the old postboy, craning in his neck, and twisting his best ear for’ards.

“ ‘To—the—market—hill,’ replied Miss Bebee, at the top of her voice, and purple in the face with exertion.

“ ‘Very good, marm,’ rejoined the old postboy, and on they proceeded.

“Design often fails where accident succeeds, is the moral of this tale,” sagely observed Mr. Bolton. “Scarcely had the crazy old yellow po’-chaise bumped a yard upon the stones of Highbridge, when out fell the bottom, and Miss Bebee, with a scream, found herself mounted on the perch.”

A roar of laughter interrupted Tom’s tale. With a serious face, he motioned for silence ; and, when it was obtained, he added—

“There was no saddle.”

Again Tom was interrupted. Minutes elapsed ere he could proceed. Roar after roar succeeded each other, and were echoed and re-echoed through the old hall, until every rafter seemed to shake with hearty, unrestrained mirth. At length, something like order was restored, and Mr. Bolton continued his story.

“As you may suppose,” said Tom, “a pair of legs under a po'-chaise, with the toes just touching the ground, and seeming to be running a race with the wheels, attracted many eyes in Highbridge. Among other astonished spectators, was a Mr. Timothy Stubbs, grocer, who, while weighing some plums, caught a side glance of the legs. Out of his shop rushed Timothy; but, treading on his long white apron, it tripped him up, and down he fell headlong into the gutter. Nothing daunted, up got Stubbs, and joined the crowd in full chase after the legs.

“‘Stop, stop!’ shouted everybody; but the order was unheard by the old postboy.

“ ‘ My legs, my precious legs ! ’ bawled Miss Bebee, using her best endeavours to keep up with the wheels. Still the old postboy kept on towards the market-hill at a gentle trot, and the crowd increased every moment.

“ ‘ What splendid legs ! ’ gasped Timothy, out of breath, and nearing the po’-chaise at every stride. ‘ I never saw such a mould ; ’ and, as he continued to run and gaze, the more he admired them.

“ At last, the market hill was reached, and the chaise came to a stop. Sooner than I can describe, Timothy seized the handle, and flung open the door. There was Miss Bebee, with her hands clutching the front part of the chaise, leaning for’ard in true jockey style, as if preparing for another start.

“ ‘ I hope you’re not hurt, ma’am, ’ said Timothy.

“ ‘ He, he ! ’ simpered Miss Bebee. ‘ Nothing of consequence.’

“ With this, Timothy assisted her off the perch, and, dragging her through the door, placed her once more upon her favourite fea-

tures. With the exception of a little stiffness, Miss Bebee suffered no apparent inconvenience from her ride; and, within three months from that day, she was handed into the same po'chaise, with a new bottom, as the better half of Timothy Stubbs, the grocer of Highbridge."

Mr. Bolton's story was much liked by his auditors, who laughed from the beginning to the end of it.

"Fill your glasses round," said the squire; "we'll take our parting glass, for it's getting late."

"We must have a song first," observed Wilmott.

"Perhaps Mr. Titley will favour us," said Agnes.

"With profound pleasure," replied Titley, who seemed to enjoy the scene as much as anybody present.

"That's right, my boy," said the squire. "Now then, silence."

In a fine mellow voice, Titley sung the following words:—

“ Who frowns to night? Not one that’s here.
Each heart beats true and sound :
Smiles beam like sunlight—not a tear
Steals from an eye around.

Chorus—None frown to-night, &c.

“ For we can look upon the past,
And feel no sorrow nigh ;
Our pleasure’s not too bright to last,
Our fears ne’er cause a sigh.
None frown to-night, &c.

“ Then drink, my friends ; let each one say,
When Time has cull’d the flowers,
My life was as a summer’s day,
Passed with the laughing hours.
None frown to-night,” &c.

At the end of Titley’s song, he received much applause, and, at a signal from the squire, all rose to take “ a bumper at parting.” Friendly shakes of the hand were exchanged, and one by one retired to rest. As William and his bride left the hall, three hearty cheers were given, and Mr. Bolton’s voice was heard above the rest. Soon after the squire and his friends had departed, none remained before the flickering embers on the hearth, except Jack Tiggie and Peter, who had returned, after changing his starched shirt. Jack sat

at one corner of the wide chimney-piece, while Peter occupied the other. After his resolution had failed him several times, Jack at length said, "It's nearly daylight, Mr. Bumstead."

Peter raised his hands from his knees, and, trying to look exceedingly grave at Jack, replied in a strangely thick voice that "he was aware of the fact."

"Shall I help you to bed, sir?" rejoined Jack, respectfully.

"If you — don't — starch — my — tail — again," replied Peter, who began to discover that nothing was steady except himself, "you may — master — John — Tig - Tig - Tiggles, you d—d — rascal!"

"Lean on me," said Jack, assisting Peter from his chair; "I'll see you home."

The pale light of a winter's morning was just tinging the horizon, and the stars were hiding from mortal gaze, as Jack, reeling beneath the staggerings of his companion, quitted the Hall.

"Jack," said Peter, after they had gone a

little way, "I really—think you-'re—drunk, sir."

"Why do you think so?" said Jack.

"Because—you—don't—seem—to—me—to walk straight," rejoined Peter.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A PAIR OF
TOP-BOOTS.

“ Now it is the time of night,
That the graves, all gaping wide,
Every one lets forth his sprite,
In the church-way paths to glide.”

It was the tenth night after William's wedding, and a week from the departure of the squire for London, when the old whipper-in occupied a cozy seat before the fire, in his son's new dwelling. Fanny was plying her needle diligently before a small work-table, placed between her and Mr. Bolton, while her husband sat by her side, preparing a pipe for his father.

“ There, governor,” said William, cramming the last piece of the fragrant weed into

the bowl, and offering the pipe to his father, "blow away your melancholy spirits."

"Ah!" sighed Tom, "I feel very close to the ground now, my son. Horses out of condition — squire away — Miss Kate — Miss Agnes — Mr. Wilmott — Mr. Titley — all gone. Ah! I wonder what frosts were made for!"

"Perhaps to try your patience, Mr. Bolton," suggested Fanny.

"I am the most patient man alive," said Mr. Bolton, giving vent to a volume of smoke; "but I can't stand frost."

"It will break by and by," replied William, "and then you'll enjoy the fun the more."

"Wisely said," rejoined Tom. "True, very true."

"Would you like a little spiced ale with your pipe?" inquired Fanny, with a sly look at her father-in-law.

Mr. Bolton withdrew the pipe from his lips, and, placing his hand on his abdominal regions, replied that he thought he should—

for he felt “a little queer just there—a sort of a sinking.”

With pleased alacrity Fanny procured the desired beverage; and after Mr. Bolton had taken a long pull at it, wiped his lips, and saluted his daughter-in-law, he seemed much refreshed.

“There,” said he; “now, if we had but Joe Jogalong here, to tell us one of his pleasant fireside stories, I should be all right again. Can’t *you* tip us something, Will? None of your love and murder stuff, that you used to mollify Fanny with, in your courting days—something fit for a huntsman to tell, and a whipper-in to hear—something sporting like — something *racy* — ha! ha!” and the old man laughed heartily at his own pun.

“Well, governor, I don’t know but I could recollect a story, that Mr. Wilmott’s groom told us t’other night at the Chequers, over a jug of ale—only Fanny mightn’t like it, for it’s all about a pair of boots.”

“A huntsman’s wife and a whipper-in’s

daughter-in-law not like to hear about a pair of boots ! Nonsense !” ejaculated Tom.

Fanny declared she should like to hear Will’s story, of all things. Accordingly, the fire was made up, the candle trimmed, Mr. Bolton replenished his pipe, Fanny placed herself in a listening attitude, and William, in a distinct and musical voice, commenced

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A PAIR OF TOP-BOOTS.

“ It was in the merry month of May, ‘when bees from flower to flower sip honey,’ that we—the boots whose history is about to be recorded—were turned over from the dark fingers of a disciple of St. Crispin to those of a coatless, dirty urchin, to be conveyed to our destined home. After looking at all the print-shops in his way and out of his way, observing, with laudable curiosity, everything worthy of notice, and successfully abstracting from the fruit-stalls divers quantities of trifling luxuries, without returning a fair equivalent for the same—it being a theory with him that property should not be selfishly appropriated,

especially apples, to which he was partial—he, at length, gave a knock and ring at the door of a proud mansion in Piccadilly. A servant, dressed in a dashing livery of scarlet and white, powdered wig, silk stockings, and gold buckles in his pumps, opened the door. Upon seeing our worthy bearer, he extracted a toothpick from his waistcoat-pocket, and evinced his contempt for the cause of his disturbance, by commencing a silent attack upon his masticators.

“Our bearer was awe-struck at the magnificent person who stood before him, and meekly inquired ‘if one Mr. Smith lived there?’

“‘Mr. *who?*’ ferociously inquired the footman.

“‘Mr. Smith, sir,’ repeated the boy.

“‘How dare you put such a preposterous interrogatory to *me!* you snivelling offspring of a female jackass,’ rejoined the footman; ‘you knew ‘one Smith’ could not possibly live here.’

“‘No, sir, I didn’t,’ said the boy.

“‘I insist upon it that you did. You

knew it well enough. *Smith*, indeed !' exclaimed the man of consequence, his nose twisting into a perfect curl, with aristocratic disgust at the plebeian name.

"The label appended to one of our straps was read over and over again by the boy, but no new light broke in upon him.

" ' Hold up the boots, that I may peruse the name,' said the footman.

" We were accordingly suspended in close proximity to the prominent feature of the flunky's countenance.

" ' Ah ! I thought so. Yes, yes, no doubt from the first,' soliloquised the footman. ' Do you know, superlative of noodles, that S—m—y—t—h—e spells *Smythe* ; and that Sir Horatio St. Vincent Rasselas de Vere Smythe is not to be inquired for as *one* Mr. Smith. Now think of that, and give my compliments to your master, and tell him the sooner he kicks you out of his service the earlier he'll please me.'

" With this we were consigned to Sir Horatio's gentleman, not sorry to be free from the

dingy paws of the boy, who, with open mouth, stood wondering, long after the door was closed, how human wisdom could be brought to such perfection as to be capable of discovering the distinction between ‘Smyth’ and ‘Smythe.’

“ ‘A pair of boots, Sir Horatio,’ introduced us to our owner, a young, dashing-looking gentleman, who was employed in his dressing-room.

“ ‘Just in the nick of time. Get the persuaders,’ said Sir Horatio to the much-altered footman, who now seemed humility personified.

“ ‘A pair of boothooks were produced, and, after much exertion, we were at length ‘persuaded’ to adjust ourselves to the feet of the tortured baronet, whose countenance expressed the pain attendant on squeezing a tolerably large foot into rather a small boot.

“ ‘I wish you had my favourite corns instead of me,’ groaned Sir Horatio.

“ ‘I wish I had, sir,’ replied the footman, with affected earnestness.

“ ‘You wish nothing of the kind,’ rejoined

Sir Horatio. ‘Now are you not a hypocritical villain?’

“ ‘Yes, I am, sir,’ meekly replied the footman. This admission soothed the tyrannical Sir Horatio, who, after threatening our extermination for pressing too closely upon his pedal extremities, coolly proceeded to complete his toilet.

“ ‘Thomas is to ride the cob,’ said Sir Horatio.

“ ‘Yes, sir. And what horse will you please to ride, Sir Horatio?’ inquired the attendant, as if pleading for his life.

“ ‘He, he, he!’ simpered his master, ‘I’ve an idea that I shall not *please* the animal I ride to-day. He, he, he! not bad. I’ll have Galopade. And say, if any one calls, that I am at St. Alban’s steeple-chase.’

“In the course of half an hour, we were on the road to St. Albans, going at furious speed; it being a maxim with Sir Horatio to ride invariably as if the prince of darkness kicked him every inch of the way. Clouds of dust rose and covered our polished surface. The bright spurs which ornamented us began to

red den from the continued pricking of the exhausted horse, and our pristine charms were much faded as we came to the terminus of our journey.

“‘That’s pretty travelling, Gaylad—twenty miles in an hour and seven minutes’—said our master, to a small, strong, thick-set man, as he dismounted from his jaded horse.

“‘It would stump up timber, an’ no mistake,’ replied the little man. ‘A ’oss made o’ steel couldn’t stand it.’

“‘Never mind, there are more where Galopade came from,’ replied Sir Horatio.

“‘Gallop-hard, you call her, do you?’ said Mr. Gaylad. ‘Well, then, you’ve given Gallop-hard a hard gallop—ha, ha, ha!’

“‘What horse do you ride, Gaylad?’ inquired Sir Horatio, dismounting.

“‘I crosses the crack, old Flyaway,’ replied the jockey.

“‘Shall you win?’ asked our master.

“‘If we can keep enough wind in our bellows,’ replied Mr. Gaylad, with a professional look of importance.

“ ‘ Now, Gaylad,’ whispered Sir Horatio, ‘ if there *is* a secret, let me into it; for I must win a lump to-day.’ ”

“ ‘ I like to do business with you, Sir Horatio, because we understand each other,’ said the jockey. ‘ I’ll tell ye how the event will come off to a moral. The crack ’ll make play, and win if he can last. If he can’t, Antelope will. There, now go and stick it on thick, and don’t forget me for the wrinkle, after the diversion.’ ”

“ In a few minutes we were in the midst of dukes, lords, marquisses, horse-dealers, blacklegs, pickpockets, and other worthy and unworthy members of society, who crowd a betting-ring all under the influence of the organ of acquisitiveness.

“ ‘ Seven to one against Humbug. Five to two against Antelope. Three to one against Moonraker. A hundred to ten against Sneaking Jerry :’ such were the various offers called out by the interested in the betting-ring.

“ Our master accepted most of the heavy

bets offered against Flyaway, and laid a great deal of money against many of the other horses.

“ ‘ My book’s closed,’ said he to a man who offered a bet.

“ ‘ I hope it’s a good un,’ whispered Gaylad ; and, taking the volume from Sir Horatio, he commenced perusing its contents with much interest:

“ ‘ That’ll do,’ said the jockey, giving the book a smack of satisfaction, and returning it to our master. ‘ You’ll hook a couple of cool thousands.’

“ ‘ If you put Flyaway in,’ said Sir Horatio, ‘ you’ll have two hundred out of them.’

“ ‘ Then in he goes to a moral,’ replied Gaylad.

“ Fifteen noble horses were brought from their stables, at the order given for preparation, and, after the process of saddling, their jockeys mounted, dressed in variegated silk and satin jackets. ‘ The crack,’ a large boned horse, was the object of attraction, and opinions differed as to his being able to last the distance. Gaylad was mounted upon him,

dressed in a green and gold livery; and, as he passed us, he gave a knowing wink, which clearly signified he was a very clever fellow in his own opinion. Sir Horatio returned the wink, and the two appeared on very excellent terms with themselves and each other.

“All was now bustle and confusion, every one being deeply interested in the race, or wishing to appear so; pushing, crowding, treading without remorse upon each other's feet, and hurrying either to the starting or to the winning-post.

“‘Come, you Grecian, vy don't yer boil us up a gallop, and steer clear of a gen'l'm?’ said a costermonger in a donkey-cart to a brother whip.

“‘Now, Bumptious! vun would be disposed for to think the old un had sold her mangle,’ replied the other.

“Sir Horatio was standing with the foot of one of us placed in the stirrup, preparing to mount Galopade, when the amusing little repartee took place between the rival donkey-cart proprietors. It attracted his atten-

tion so much that Sir Horatio imagined a sudden and painful pressure upon his favourite foot was caused by the plebeian hoof of an effeminate-looking quill-driver, standing close to him. In an instant, thwack, thwack, thwack, came Sir Horatio's riding-whip upon the shoulders of the supposed offender, who started and jumped about like a parched pea upon a drumhead.

“ ‘ I'll teach you to tread on my boot, you white-jawed snob !’ said Horatio.

“ ‘ Tread on your boot, sir !’ exclaimed the individual, rubbing his smarting shoulders. ‘ I never touched your boot, sir. And I tell you what, sir, you have committed an assault, sir. And I'll bring an action for damages, sir.’

“ ‘ Damages be d—d !’ replied Sir Horatio. ‘ If you say another word, I'll thrash you within a hair's breadth of your beggarly existence.’

“ The unfortunate individual immediately receded twenty yards upon hearing this friendly warning ; and Sir Horatio threw himself into the saddle, and was on the point of

starting, when his groom informed him it was the *horse's* foot, and not the man's, that did the mischief.

“ ‘ Indeed ! Then I was in error,’ replied Sir Horatio, quite unconcerned at the trifling mistake.

“ Our master, and consequently ourselves, were now stationed at the winning-post, where, after remaining a short period, the assembled motley group shouted, ‘ Here they come ! Flyaway’s first, Antelope’s second, and Sneaking Jerry’s third.’

“ ‘ Flyaway against the two, for five hundred,’ hallooed Sir Horatio, flushed with excitement.

“ ‘ That’s a bet,’ replied the facetious costermonger, which much pleased the ragged portion of the mobility.

“ The two horses, Flyaway and Antelope, were now neck and neck, taking the fences so exactly together, that it was impossible to form any conclusion as to which would be the winner. Their respective riders were using all their energies to increase the speed. Whip

and spur were applied with unrelenting perseverance, and the reins were rolled with that peculiar twist which stimulates the horse to exertion. Still no perceptible advantage was gained by either. On they came, as if linked together, topping banks and hedges, clearing brooks and ditches, with perfect equality of pace and power.

“The last barrier, previous to entering the meadow where the winning flag fluttered, consisted of a high bank, with a wide ditch on both sides. The jockeys prepared for the rasper. Their horses dashed straight at it. ‘Over,’ cried Gaylad, throwing out his whip hand. Flyaway cleared the leap, but fell from exhaustion on reaching the ground, and his jockey whisked in the thin air, like a shuttlecock. Antelope jumped across the bank, scrambled for an instant, and then fell powerless into the ditch beneath, carrying his rider with him.

“Directly Gaylad rose from embracing the turf, he shook himself, and, exclaiming ‘All right!’ proceeded to excite the prostrate horse

to rise, by a gentle hint from his tormentor; but the poor creature groaned, and at each attempt to get up fell again.

“‘Up you must get,’ said the irritated jockey. ‘If you can’t carry me in, I must carry you.’

“Sir Horatio and others proceeded to assist the tired and breathless animal from the ground, with as much despatch as possible.

“‘Now, Gaylad, for Heaven’s sake, get on,’ said the baronet, pale with anxiety and excitement.

“The third horse, Sneaking Jerry, now approached. Flyaway turned his head to look at his antagonist, and with a bound the noble creature galloped forwards, requiring neither whip nor spur to reach the goal foremost in the race. This was no sooner accomplished than, with a staggering rear, he fell lifeless to the earth.

“‘That’s good pilotage—touch and go,’ said Gaylad, with a satisfactory chuckle.

“‘Poor old Flyaway!’ exclaimed Sir Horatio; ‘I’m truly sorry the gallant fellow’s

dead. 'Pon my honour, I should have preferred the death of my nearest relation.'

"'Ha, ha, ha! that's capital!' said the jockey. 'But what's the odds! He died like a trump, in his glory, and not as half of 'em do, in the knacker's amputation shop.'

"The baronet and Gaylad were so elated with their success, that it was resolved they should dine together. After the dinner, the wine passed very freely, and not many hours elapsed before each became assured that he was the finest fellow imaginable.

"'I say, Gaylad, give me a song,' said Sir Horatio, in rather a peculiar and inarticulate voice.

"'Upon my—honour,' replied the jockey, at a loss for security, 'I never could ——' and a hiccup cut short the sentence.

"'The deuce you—can't,' rejoined Sir Horatio, upsetting a decanter; 'then we must emigrate, for diversion. By the by, I entertained an—an—an idea—that a fellow—trod on my—boot, this (hiccup) morning—so I thrashed the miserable—Gaylad, he was a—a—d—d *miserable* (hiccup) adverb.'

“ ‘Was he, by G—d!’ said the jockey.

“ ‘I give you my word—he was—a mere—(three hiccups) shoestring,’ replied Sir Horatio.

“ ‘Sarved him right,’ rejoined Gaylad. ‘Hit him again—he hasn’t a friend in the world.’

“ ‘So I will,’ replied Sir Horatio, rising with the assistance of the edge of the table. ‘Let’s go and—pul—pul—pulverize the—inde—cli—nable—adverb.’

“ ‘They now proceeded to the stable-yard of the inn, and, after parading up and down in a serpentine for a few minutes, discovered the object of their search, leaning against a water-butt, quietly puffing a cigar. His hat was placed carelessly on one side, and, from the ease and comfort of his deportment, he seemed to have buried in oblivion the unpleasant rencontre of the morning.

“ ‘I had the—felicity of—of horsewhipping you this—morning,’ said Sir Horatio, dragging Gaylad with him close to the unoffending stranger.

“ ‘Yes, sir,’ fiercely replied he; ‘and——’

“ ‘I’ll thrash you—again—this—evening,’ interrupted Sir Horatio.

“ ‘What, sir! Eh, sir!’ exclaimed the terrified adverb, assuming a posture of defence.

“ ‘It’s no use your doing that,’ said Gaylad, in a friendly voice, and shaking his head. ‘You’d much better take it quietly.’

“ ‘Much—better,’ added the baronet.

“ ‘Never,’ replied the stranger, ‘never.’

“ ‘I’m going to—to—chastise you—you wretched—interro—gation, for——’

“ ‘What, sir? I say for what, sir?’ inquired the alarmed individual.

“ ‘Do tell him, Gaylad, for I—quite forget,’ replied the baronet.

“ ‘You’re going to be licked for—for—for nothing—which of course you deserve, you know,’ said the jockey, in a convincing tone.

“ ‘Ah! yes, that’s it. I knew—it was—for something,’ added Sir Horatio.

“ ‘The persecuted one was stultified at the charge. He gazed with wondering looks first

at one and then at the other of his accusers. At last he stammered out—

“ ‘I’m in the law; and, without going into the merits of the case, I beg to submit there’s a flaw in the pleadings; so your case is dismissed with costs.’

“ And, seizing the edge of the water-butt, he pulled it to the ground, dashing its contents over the baronet and Gaylad.

As soon as Sir Horatio had recovered from his profound astonishment at having the tables, or, more properly, the water-butt, turned upon him, he sent the toe of one of us with a hearty good will against the terminus of the offender. However, after a dozen good kicks, the unhappy individual could bear no more unresistingly. The British lion was roused within his breast, and, clawing hold of the baronet, they pulled, scuffled, reeled, and in a few seconds down they rolled into the mud, effectually altering for the worse the appearance of all parties.

“ ‘The devil!’ said Sir Horatio, rising, ‘he’s—he’s—spoiled my boots!’

“ And so he had, sure enough, to our great future discomfort ; for the change in our hitherto immaculate appearance caused the dandy baronet to discard us from his favour, and his valet sold us for an old song.”

William paused as he finished the sentence.

“ That’s not all,” asked Tom, “ is it ?”

“ No,” replied William ; “ but I thought you might be tired of the top-boots.”

“ Not at all,” replied Mr. Bolton ; “ I should like to hear some more of what they’ve got to say.”

Fanny replenished Tom’s glass with the tempting liquid, and, after his pipe had been re-filled, the trio settled themselves in easy positions, and William resumed his tale.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A PAIR OF TOP-BOOTS.

(CONTINUED.)

“ For aught that ever I could read,
Could ever hear by tale or history,
The course of true love never did run smooth.”

“ **T**HE next change in our circumstances called upon us to adorn, in a somewhat faded condition, the short, bandy legs of a superannuated postboy at the George Inn, Hounslow Heath. With body carelessly reclined against the corner post of the stable-yard, and crossed feet, he cast a sheep’s eye towards the great metropolis, and occasionally the reverse way, anticipating the approach of a carriage requiring fresh horses. At length one was visible in the distance, rattling along with four horses at full gallop.

“ ‘ Now then, bring out the first two pair,’ hallooed he; ‘ and don’t come the undertaker’s move.’

Before the horses could be brought from their stalls, an elegant dark green chariot dashed up to the entrance. The riders of the reeking animals jumped from their saddles, the groom in the rumble sprung from his seat, and the flushed countenance of a handsome, military-looking young man simultaneously popped itself out of the window.

“ ‘ Quick, quick !’ exclaimed he.

“ ‘ In less than no time, sir,’ replied our wearer.

“ ‘ Clap on them traces, old butter-thumbs,’ said the groom.

“ ‘ Your veels vants vatering,’ squeaked a postboy in embryo, pointing to the smoking axles.

“ ‘ How long *are* you going to be?’ impatiently asked the gentleman; ‘ I never saw such a set of idle, awkward scamps in all my life.’

“ ‘ All right, sir,’ replied the servant,

touching his hat, and springing into the rumble.

“ Away we started at furious speed, a bargain having been quickly struck between the groom and the postboys, that they were to ride the whole of the stage at full gallop, for two sovereigns each.

“ What postboy would not ride an eight-mile stage as hard as he could go, for two sovereigns? Is there such a curiosity extant?

“ Our respected master rode the wheel-horses, and, careless of the pole rubbing our very *soles* out, fulfilled his agreement to the letter. Not an instant did he relent from stimulating the horses to their full speed. ‘ Keep ’em on the stretch like fiddle-strings,’ cried he to his partner on the leaders. ‘ We’ll make ’em fly.’

“ We had proceeded about two miles, and were descending a steep hill, when one of the pole-chains snapped. Our master made known the accident to the rider before him, and, with exquisite skill, twisted the carriage on to a

bank, and stopped it without any material damage. The young man stuck his head out of the window, and passionately inquired the cause of our stopping.

“ ‘Chain broke, sir,’ was the laconic reply.

“ ‘What shall we do! what *shall* we do!’ exclaimed a female voice from the chariot.

“ ‘Emily, you’ll certainly drive me mad,’ said the young man. ‘Gracious heavens! I’m distracted,’ said he, clutching his hair.

“ ‘I’m fainting, Charles, I’m fainting!’ screamed the voice from inside the carriage.

“ ‘Emily, for Heaven’s sake! for *my* sake! don’t at this moment!’ said the young man, opening the door, and jumping out.

“ He had scarcely done so when the groom exclaimed,—

“ ‘Get in, sir! get in! Here they come, by St. George!’ and he pushed his master unceremoniously into the carriage.

“ ‘Who! when! where! Let me see! Gracious heavens! Boys, ride for your lives! A hundred pounds if you get through the

next gate before that carriage on the top of the hill there. Go on! go on!

“Such were the confused exclamations, offers, and orders, of the distracted Charles, who appeared frantic at seeing a phaeton approaching, at full speed, not so much as a mile distant.

“‘How shall we escape, dear Charles? Do tell me, love,’ entreated Emily.

“‘I shall certainly go mad! Go on—give it them—that’s it! He gains upon us. Stop on the other side of the gate. Do you hear?’ hallooed Charles.

“‘Ay, ay, sir—all right,’ replied our master.

“On rushed the horses at a reckless speed, the postboys using their best endeavours to reach the gate, now about half a mile off. The carriage in pursuit was also being propelled at an inordinate rate down the hill. It rolled from one side to the other, and appeared every moment in danger of being upset. Standing up in it might be seen a fine old gentleman, with locks as white as the

driven snow, looking through a glass at the chariot he was chasing with so much evident determination of capture. Now and then, he would encourage his postillions by shaking a well-filled purse at them. Then whip and spur were applied afresh, and the horses urged forwards to the utmost stretch of their power.

“ ‘ We shall catch them; ha, ha, ha!’ laughed the old gentleman. ‘ The piratical rascal, I shall grapple him,’ said he, plainly seeing that he was gaining upon the pursued at every stride.

“ In a handful of seconds we reached the desired gate, and stopped as suddenly as our impetus would permit. But many yards before the carriage could be stopped, Charles and the servant leaped from their seats, and jumped into the door of the toll-gate house. The former seized the turnpike-man by the throat, and said,—

“ ‘ Give me the key of the gate, or I’ll strangle you on the spot.’

“ ‘ Have mercy on us!’ exclaimed the terrified man, who thought he had got into

the hands of a lunatic; 'I've a wife and ten helpless babbies.'

" 'Where's the key?' roared Charles, squeezing him.

" 'There it is,' gurgled the man; 'I've a wife and——'

" Bang went the gate, which prevented the repeated sentence from being heard. The key was quickly turned in the lock by Charles, and on dashed the carriage at its former rate. Scarcely had it proceeded a hundred yards when the phaeton arrived at the obstructing barrier.

" 'Gate, gate!' shouted the postillions.

" 'Gate, you scoundrel! open that gate!' bawled the old gentleman, in a terrific passion.

" 'T'other one's stole the key, and I can't,' replied the bewildered toll-keeper.

" 'Then I'll be the death of you,' rejoined the old gentleman, 'you villain, I will!'

" 'I fear it's no go,' said one of the riders.

" 'The cunning rascal!' exclaimed the old gentleman; 'just as he was within my grasp'

to escape me. But I'll have him yet. Which is the fastest horse?' inquired he.

" 'This is the clipper, an' no mistake,' replied one of the postillions, pointing to the horse he was on.

" 'Get off, then—shorten the stirrups—give me your whip; now your spurs. There,' said the gentleman, climbing into the saddle. 'Will he leap?'

" 'He'll try, sir, if you put him at it stiff,' was the reply.

"The old gentleman tightened his rein, turned his horse's head towards the hedge on the roadside, and driving the inexperienced animal forwards, had the greatest difficulty in saving himself from a summerset, as the animal suddenly stopped in his career, and refused the jump. Again he was tried; but he declined. The postillions stood grinning, and appeared much pleased at the old gentleman's courage, or 'pluck,' as they called it.

" 'Give him another trial, sir; I'll tip him a hint from behind,' said one of them, cracking his whip.

“ Again the reluctant horse was urged to perform a part quite out of his line, and the promised hint being given in the shape of a severe cut with the whip, he half scrambled, half tumbled through the brambles into the ditch on the opposite side. After a great deal of splashing on his part, and holding on by the mane and pummel of the saddle by the old gentleman, they effected a landing in the field. They then proceeded a few yards along the side of the ditch, when again the horse was required to try his skill at a leap, at which he did not evince so great aversion. He had been upon the road the greater portion of his life, and, with the delight of a fish regaining its native element, he sprung with desperate courage over both ditch and hedge, regaining his long-used road on the other side of the locked gate.

“ The postillions cheered, the toll-gate man grumbled about ‘evading the toll,’ and the old gentleman galloped away in pursuit of the fugitives. On they rattled as fast as the horse could go, and he clearly caught some of the

enthusiasm of his rider, for, in the whole course of his posting career, he never displayed such energy and good will.

“ ‘ It’s all over with us!’ exclaimed Charles, as he caught a glimpse of the pursuing horseman, and throwing himself back despondingly in the carriage.

“ ‘ Charles, love! do tell me what you mean,’ entreated Emily.

“ ‘ Mean!’ replied he. ‘ I mean, my angel, that the governor will overtake us in less than three minutes.’

“ ‘ Oh, dear me! I shall faint, Charles,’ said Emily, seizing him by the neck. ‘ Tell me how we can escape, dear.’

“ ‘ Escape is impossible, for although, Emily, you’re a dove, alas! you have no wings,’ replied Charles. ‘ See, there he comes on horseback. Oh! that the brute would tumble.’

“ ‘ Charles, recollect, sir, that brute is my father, a kind, good——’ and a flood of tears cut short Emily’s rejoinder.

“ ‘ I meant the horse, not the rider, dear,’ said Charles. ‘ Stop, stop,’ cried he; ‘ it’s no use going on. We must be overtaken.’

“ The postboys obeyed the mandate by reining in their foaming steeds, and bringing the carriage to a sudden stop.

“ ‘ Now for a pretty scene,’ said Charles, with a melancholy visage, anticipating with anything but pleasurable sensations a meeting with ‘ the governor.’

“ In a few brief seconds the old gentleman arrived at a gallop, breathless, at the side of the carriage. Large drops of perspiration trickled down his rubicund countenance, and he sternly gazed upon his daughter and the abashed Charles. There was a long, silent pause, as if each was afraid to break it. At length the old gentleman said, in a voice trembling with emotion—

“ ‘ Did I deserve this, Emily?’

“ ‘ Permit me, sir,’ said Charles, in a firm, but respectful manner, ‘ to explain this affair, and take upon myself the blame; for I alone have caused it. I acquainted you with the feelings of mutual attachment existing between your daughter and myself, and without the slightest concealment told you of my

situation and prospects. They were, you replied, unobjectionable ; but that you would not consent to Emily becoming the wife of a soldier. I expostulated with you, but failed, after a great many attempts, to overcome your objection. As the only alternative left, therefore, to possess your daughter, I, with great difficulty, persuaded her to become mine without your consent, and we were on the road ——.’

“ ‘To the devil, sir,’ interrupted the old gentleman.

“ ‘Pray forgive us, papa,’ said Emily, in such an entreating, bewitching manner, that no father could withstand. He, however, was not too hasty in overlooking such a serious piece of insubordination, as an attempt at a runaway match. A stern frown bent his brows, although a smile played about his lips, notwithstanding his endeavours to suppress it.

“ ‘You two rascals,’ said he ; ‘ you thought to escape me with your manœuvres, but I was too much for you, old as I am, you scamps !’

“ ‘Yes, sir,’ added Charles ; ‘ I admit that I did all in my power to succeed ; but ——.’

“‘I beat ye,’ added the old gentleman, with great satisfaction at his success ; ‘ and, yet,’ continued he, after a pause, during which the horses were recovering from their great exertions, and the riders were wiping the heat-drops from their foreheads, “perhaps I was as wrong with my obstinate and silly objection, as you, Charles, in being so very hasty. I forgive ye from my heart ; you can’t say, however, but my plan beat yours, and that Emily will now be your wife with my consent.’

“The road was retraced, and we accompanied as happy a trio as ever took ‘hasty steps.’”

“That’s all very well,” said Mr. Bolton, as William finished the account of the runaway match ; “but a gal that would bolt from her father, wouldn’t be over-nice about doing the like by her husband. That’s my opinion.”

“That depends upon circumstances,” replied Fanny ; “if a parent has no reason to object, but obstinately refuses his consent, I

think young people are quite right to run away."

"Pooh, pooh! Mrs. B.," rejoined Tom; "never advocate a bolt. Runaway colts are sure to bruise or bog themselves. They'd better champ the bit, you may depend."

"Well, *I* wouldn't," said Fanny.

"Ha, ha! what, you'd take to leather, would you!" replied Tom.

"To be sure, I would," rejoined Fanny.

"You see, governor," said William, "we should have made a start of it, in case of a check."

"Check!" repeated Mr. Bolton; "I was too glad for you to buckle on the tether. In harness, my boy; running as a match pair now; ha, ha, ha! *Check*, indeed!"

"Shall I tell you any more about the boots?" inquired Will.

"Not to-night, my son," replied Tom. "I'm a bit too much like a dormouse in winter for a long yarn. But, if you'll finish it to-morrow night, well and good."

"To be sure I will, governor," rejoined his

son ; “ and, as you don’t want me to talk any more at a long stretch, why here goes for a cloud. Just one pipe suits me.”

“ It did me once, Will,” said Mr. Bolton.

“ But two, or even three, are nearer the bull’s-eye, now-a-days.”

William and his father smoked their pipes almost in silence, and, as the latter took his last whiff, he observed Fanny was dozing in her chair.

“ Ah !” softly exclaimed the old whipper-in, “ it’s time for roosting ;” and, rising from his chair, he said, “ good night,” and left the cottage for his own.

CHAPTER XX.

PARTRIDGE SHOOTING.

“ When icicles hang by the wall,
And Dick, the shepherd, blows his nail,
And Tom bears logs into the hall,
And milk comes frozen home in pail,
When blood is nipp’d, and ways be foul,
Then nightly sings the staring owl.”

UPON the ground the snow lay thickly, and crisped beneath the tread. The leafless boughs were furred over with haze-frost, sparkling in the light. Cold and piercing was the wind, as it whistled through the trees and jarring casement. Birds stood with ruffled feathers, burying first one leg and then the other in their downy breasts. It was a morning in the depth of winter. Peter strode across the park, closely buttoned in his shooting-jacket, with a scarlet comforter twisted round his neck and chin, and in which he con-

trived to bury the end of his nose. A white cotton night-cap was pulled over his ears, and his hat pressed close to his brow. Under his right arm he squeezed a double-barrel gun, both hands fathoming his breeches' pockets. A brace of liver and white pointers, very much alike, with a large brown spaniel, kept close to his heels. Striver, with his cat-cap turned inside out for greater warmth, walked by the side of the keeper, taking two steps to his companion's one, and Jack Tiggles followed, with a huge game-bag strapped across his shoulders.

"It's too cold to last," observed Striver.

"I hope so," replied Peter, coughing at the end of the sentence, when his breath seemed like the eruption of a volcano.

"I can't feel my fingers," said Jack.

"It would be a good job if you never could," replied the keeper, in his usual surly tone, "for then you might be kept out of mischief, perhaps."

"Indeed, Mr. Bumstead," rejoined Jack. "That's your opinion, is it? Mine's t'other way."

“*Your* opinion!” added Peter; “we’ve come to a pretty pass, when *boys* talk o’ their opinions, I’m a-thinkin’.”

“Remember,” returned Jack, “I once told you a story about a young donkey and an old jackass.”

The keeper turned abruptly round, and, extracting a heavy dog-whip from one of his capacious pockets, held it in a threatening manner over Jack’s shoulders.

“Ah!” exclaimed Jack, lifting a finger, and shaking his head as a warning, “mind, Mr. Bumstead, mind what you’re about.”

Down came the lash; but it fell upon the loins of the unoffending spaniel.

“Come to heel,” roared the keeper, forgetting the dog was in the desired position, and continuing his walk with a growl of dissatisfaction.

Jack tittered his triumph, and followed him.

“The red-legs can’t run this morning,” said Striver; “they’ll lay close enough in the hedgerows, with this snow on the ground.”

“I suppose they will,” replied Peter, striding over a fence into a turnip-field.

“Hold up, Sapho, hold up, Romp,” said he, when the pointers bounded forward.

“Come in,” continued the keeper, inflicting an angry kick upon the ribs of the spaniel, as she evinced an inclination to join the pointers in the run. “What are you about, Nell? what *are* you about, Nell?” inquired he, thonging the unfortunate Nell, who squealed lustily, as she rolled in the snow. Her last expostulatory squeak was dying away into silence, when Striver called “To ho!”

“To ho, Romp!” hallooed Peter, lifting his hand as the dog came to a point; when Sapho, who was scouring a distant part of the field, caught the signal, and stood in a moment, as if petrified. Motionless the animal turned her head towards her companion, with her eager eyeballs staring from their sockets.

Peter regarded the picture-like attitude of the dogs with a look of pride, and said, “That’s what I call not amiss for first season pups.”

“Button—” commenced Striver.

“Bother Button,” interrupted the keeper, proceeding towards Romp.

Click, click, went the locks as Peter prepared the ready trigger, and clutched his gun in a convenient posture for the shot.

“Softly, Romp, softly,” said he, as the dog seemed too eager for the spring, and gently moved her lifted fore-foot as he approached.

When within a few feet of her, a large covey rose. In an instant the keeper’s gun was brought to bear. Bang, bang! roared the noisy piece, and right and left the victims were struck. One fell riddled through the head; but the other mounted like a soaring lark. High into the air it rose, winging a perpendicular flight towards the blue firmament; but, when it had reached a strange height, down it came within a short distance of Sapho, who rushed towards it.

“Down charge, Saph—o,” bawled the keeper.

In a moment the order was obeyed; the dog crouched to the earth, scarcely daring to lift her head from it.

“Obedient as whipped children,” observed the trapper.

“Without the whip, too,” replied Peter. “I seldom touch ’em. Such bred uns as them don’t require much o’ the flax,” added he, recharging his gun.

When this was accomplished, and the nipples capped, Nell was ordered to fetch the game. First one bird was brought by the pleased retriever, and deposited at the feet of the keeper, with such care that not a feather was ruffled, and then away she went to seek for the other. A little jealousy was evinced on the part of Romp at this stage of the proceedings. Up she started from her recumbent posture; but the harsh warning from the keeper brought her again to the ground. After a little seeking, Nell found the dead partridge, and, playfully tossing her head as she came along, laid it by the side of the other. Peter picked up the birds, and, after depositing them in Jack’s game-bag, gave the order to “hold up.”

“I marked those birds,” said Jack.

“Where are they?” inquired Peter.

“In the osier-ground,” replied Jack.

“Where they may stop,” rejoined the

keeper. "I want some o' the Frenchmen, not the grey birds."

Not five minutes had elapsed when Romp flew round in her gallop, and, in a half curve, came to a stanch point.

"Something close by, I know," whispered Peter.

Without any signal being given, Sapho backed, and stood motionless to her companion's find.

First looking at one dog and then the other, Peter's features were illuminated with pleasure. Without saying a word, he pointed to them, for Striver's special observance of their excellence. As they approached the spot where Romp was pointing, a rabbit leaped from a form. The roar of one barrel clanged through the air, and over tumbled the rabbit; but still neither of the dogs stirred. Coolly the keeper charged again, and silently strode towards Romp. Round he walked; but nothing rose. At length he proceeded close to her, when he perceived a frightened hare crouched immediately under the dog's jaws.

“Steady, steady, Romp,” said Peter, in a suppressed voice, knowing the severe trial she was about undergoing for so young a dog.

Slightly he touched the leaves which sheltered panting puss, when, with a skip, she fled from her form, and rushed across the field. Romp leaped three or four yards as the hare rose, but dropped flat on the ground as the chiding voice of the keeper reached her. At a long distance the hare shewed her ears above the turnips, when Peter’s unerring aim brought her upon her back without a struggle.

“No fault to find there, I think,” said Peter, exultingly. “How the squire will love them dogs next season !” continued he.

“I’d prefer your shooting any thing instead of hares,” observed Jack.

“Why so ?” asked Peter.

“Because they’re so heavy to carry,” rejoined Jack.

“Ah !” exclaimed Peter, “lazy folks never come to no good. When I was a boy, nothing pleased me more than carrying three brace o’ Jack hares.”

“Ho, ho, ho!” laughed Jack; “that beats cock-fighting, that does. But I suppose you meant to add, the less the distance the more you were pleased, eh, Mr. Bumstead?”

The keeper returned no answer to this query; but, having reloaded his gun, ordered Nell to bring the hare.

“What a whacker!” exclaimed Jack, as Nell dragged rather than carried the hare to her master, who handed it to Jack.

“A leash more o’ them ——,” said he.

“Won’t be carried by me,” interrupted Jack; “so think of that before you blaze at them.”

Without deigning to notice this mutinous declaration, Peter waved his hand, and the dogs recommenced hunting.

“You haven’t picked the rabbit up yet,” said Jack.

“True,” replied Peter; “I forgot that. Seek lost, Nell.”

“She has it,” observed Striver. “I never saw a better one than her to find dead or wounded game.”

“And never will,” replied Peter. “The only fault she has is a *leetle* too much anxiety.”

“You’ll find some snipes yonder, I expect,” said the trapper, pointing to a marsh on the verge of the river.

“I don’t want to find many o’ them, with these dogs,” replied the keeper. “With old ones it does no harm; but snipe-shooting with young dogs slacks their mettle and spoils ’em.”

At this moment, Sapho came to a steady point in a hedgerow, and Romp returned the compliment which had been paid to her, by backing it.

“Steady, my maid,” said the keeper. “I’ll go on the opposite side,” continued he, “while you two go a little ahead on this.”

Observing Peter’s instructions, Striver and Jack proceeded towards the spot where Sapho was. From the bank of the ditch where she stood, a French partridge rose, and had just topped the hedge, when the keeper’s gun blazed at it. The bird winced, but continued its course. Again the roar echoed o’er hill and dale, when plump the dead bird fell on

the margin of the river, and, as it reached the ground, a scared snipe rose with a shrill, piping noise, but dipped again ere it had proceeded far.

“Did you hear that?” asked the trapper.

“Ay, and see him too,” replied Peter. “But stop a bit,” continued he; “we shall find more o’ these red-legged warmin about here.”

Scarcely had he said this, when another gay-plumed partridge whir-r-d from the hedge, and escaped unscathed. His safety was owing to the keeper’s barrels being unprepared.

“Bother my ’numb’d fingers!” exclaimed Peter, squeezing on the caps.

“Look out,” said Jack, hearing a flutter in the ditch, and out flew a leash of birds. The two first had scarcely topped the fence, when they were dropped almost simultaneously by the keeper.

“Down they come, and no mistake,” said Jack, peeping through the hedge at the birds fluttering on the ground.

“They lay like logs this morning,” observed the trapper.

“This is just the mornin’ to cripple the Frenchmen,” returned Peter.

“Won’t you go after that snipe now?” inquired Striver.

“Hush!” replied the keeper, seeing Romp drawing warily up the ditch. “There’s more here,” continued he. “A running one, for a thousand to nothing.”

The pointer crept with the same caution as a cat would use after a mouse. At length she stopped, and up rose a bird, flying directly over Peter’s head. He chuckled an inward laugh as the dead partridge bounded on the hard ground.

“I never miss ’em,” said he. “Fetch him here, good Nell.”

After the bird was bagged, Peter desired Striver and Jack to keep the pointers with them, while he and Nell went to look for the snipe.

The trapper took from his pocket some couples, and, buckling them on the dogs’

necks, led them through a gap in the hedge.

“There,” said he, leaning on his “spud,” “now we shall see a smart shot, if he finds him.”

“Which there’s little doubt of,” added Jack.

Peter was now walking on the edge of the frozen stream, closely followed by Nell, when, from among some withered water-flags, a flock of teal sprung. In a body they rose from the sedges, and scarcely had gained a score yards on the wing, when a destructive volley was poured into them by the keeper.

“Capital! famous!” said he, seeing the wounded ducks fall upon the ice. “No less than two couple and a half, I’m a thinkin. Bring ’em here, Nell.”

On to the glassy surface Nell jumped, and rolled over and over as she slipped upon it.

“Never mind, old gal,” said Peter, laughing. “Try again.”

“What pretty little ducks,” observed Jack, arriving in a run to the spot,

“They’re uncommon fat, too,” said Peter, feeling the weight of one, as he took it from Nell’s jaws, and dropped it into the game-bag. “There,” continued he, taking the fifth teal from the retriever, “that’ll make a good basket for the squire in London. We’ll shut up shop for to-day.”

CHAPTER XXI.

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A PAIR OF TOP-BOOTS.

(CONCLUDED.)

“ —————For herein Fortune shews herself—
————— It is still her use
To let the wretched man outlive his wealth,
To view, with hollow eye and wrinkled brow,
An age of poverty.”

THE following evening Mr. Bolton was sitting in the most comfortable posture he could assume before the fire in his son's cottage, and wafting volumes of smoke from his lips, when he drew his pipe suddenly from them, and said, “ Come, Will, finish the story you were telling me last night. I want to know what becomes of the boots.”

“ You shall, governor,” replied the huntsman. “ But wait until Fanny has put away the tea-things; they make such a clattering noise.”

“ I’ve finished now,” said Fanny, closing a cupboard.

“ Very good,” returned William, seating himself opposite to his father. “ Then here goes ;” and he recommenced

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A PAIR OF
TOP-BOOTS.

“ Shortly after the adventure just related, we were pawned for half-a-crown by the old postboy, to ‘ raise the wind,’ as he expressed it. Three months had we remained neglected in the pawnbroker’s shop, and beheld many a scene of misery there, when, just before the prescribed hour for closing the business of the day, in the dreary month of November, a person entered, of so peculiar an appearance, that we were at once curious to learn the purport of his visit. He was nearly six feet in height—thin, and pale. Long, straight, black hair hung upon the spot where the collar of a coat should have been, but where only a remnant remained ; a rusty, black silk neckerchief was carefully pinned over a bosom,

there was every reason to suspect, devoid of a second covering ; a shabby suit of clothes, originally intended for one of much shorter stature, stuck in tatters about his person ; a crushed, silk hat was pulled over his eyes, and his chilled feet shuffled with difficulty in a pair of worn-out slippers. As he stood in the broad glare of a gas-light which flared upon his attenuated figure, and care-worn, furrowed features, an object of greater wretchedness cannot be imagined. With shaking hand, which seemed seldom to have performed a menial's office, so white and delicate were the wasted fingers, he unwrapped several small pieces of paper, and at length offered a plain, gold ring to the pawnbroker.

“ ‘ Why, what's this ? ’ inquired Mr. Crouch.

“ ‘ You will find it pure gold,’ replied the dejected applicant. ‘ Give me all you can upon it.’

“ ‘ What a merry fellow you are,’ rejoined Mr. Crouch, looking at him intently. ‘ Whenever I see you it makes me think of what a ghost in debt would look like ; and when you

“ speak, it puts me in mind of a corpse with a severe cold.’

“ The pawnbroker ended his lively similies with a laugh that caused some minutes to elapse before he could proceed with the loan.

“ ‘ No matter what I put you in mind of,’ rejoined the spiritless man. ‘ You are too familiar with misfortune to be capable of compassion for even my wretchedness. But you might refrain from jesting with calamity so bitter—so very bitter.’

“ In so melancholy and broken-hearted a tone were the last few words uttered—so truly worn to the last dregs of affliction did the speaker seem—that even the pawnbroker looked sorry for his heartless levity; and in almost a kind voice, approaching to that in which, perchance, he spoke in childhood’s generous hour, before he had learned to traffic for pence with the wants of the afflicted, he said—

“ ‘ Come, come, I didn’t mean to hurt your feelings. Don’t come the melancholy with one; I can’t abide it, as it were.’

“ ‘ If you knew all,’ rejoined the afflicted man, ‘ indeed you would. But, no matter. Give me all you can afford upon the ring, and let me go.’

“ ‘ Well, now, I can’t give you more than two half-crowns on it,’ said Mr. Crouch, in a conciliatory tone.

“ ‘ Well, give me that,’ replied the unhappy being, with tears slowly trickling down his thin hollow cheeks.

“ ‘ I tell you what it is,’ observed the pawnbroker, ‘ you seem to me to be pretty considerably stumped up. And, though our profession, as it were, is not remarkable for a particular giveable nature, I’ll fork out half a sovereign without security, if you’ll tell me your history, as it were.’

“ An incredulous look passed over the features of the object of Mr. Crouch’s commiseration. He could not believe that he heard correctly, until the kind offer was repeated.

“ ‘ You may think it singular,’ observed Mr. Crouch, ‘ but I will. So, tip us a tale of your prostration, for I see you have been a gentleman.’

“ ‘ You have seen me before this evening,’ said the man.

“ ‘ I know that as well as you,’ replied the pawnbroker. ‘ And you call yourself on the tickets John Steel. Is that your right name?’

“ ‘ No,’ rejoined he; ‘ my proper name is James Buchan—generally known as Colonel Buchan. In such places as these, few, I suppose, give their real names,’ observed the colonel.

“ ‘ That’s true,’ replied Crouch; ‘ but, what’s the use of such ’umbug. If people arn’t ashamed to come in their proper persons to borrow the brads of us, why should they be ashamed of putting their proper names? It’s what I call ’umbug, as it were.’

“ The colonel made no observation when the pawnbroker delivered this sagacious opinion; and he continued :—

“ ‘ If people were as particular about doing actions that other people consider not quite the thing, as they are of having ’em known, there wouldn’t be quite so many done, as it were. But, colonel, p’rhaps you’ll tip us a

little o' your history, and then I'll be as good as my word.'

" 'I must sit while I relate it to you,' replied the colonel, 'for I am too weak to stand.'

" 'Certainly, colonel, certainly,' rejoined Mr. Crouch; 'I shan't take in any more to-night; so come into my parlour, and we'll have a glass over it.'

" With this the pawnbroker ushered his astonished guest into a small back parlour at the end of the shop, where a cheerful little fire blazed away, giving an air of comfort to the contracted apartment, and shedding its glowing rays on the smoked and dingy walls. A large antique chair, (once a proud baron's seat) was wheeled within a few feet of the grate by the philanthropic pawnbroker, and his guest was invited to occupy its easy cushion.

" 'There,' said Mr. Crouch, 'make your miserable life 'appy, while I assist Bill in shuttin' up the shop. Here, you Bill.'

" 'Sir,' replied Bill, making his appearance.

“ ‘ We’ll close,’ said the pawnbroker.

“ ‘ Yes, sir,’ replied Bill, with a grin of delight.

“ We feel it our duty to describe this Bill, ere we proceed with the colonel’s story. He was a short squab youth, of about seventeen, with a face so blanched and sodden, that it appeared to have been poulticed. His eyes, the colour of a boiled fish, were so prominent and so wide open, that he constantly looked as if he was in a fright ; like angels, and *unlike* tax-gatherers’ visits, his hairs were ‘ few and far between ’ upon his pink and shiny scalp. His teeth were even and gigantic, but, from the propensity of smoking penny cigars, and totally dispensing with a toothbrush, their hue was any thing but pearly. The costume which adorned Bill’s person consisted of a promiscuous collection of unredeemed pledges. His coat was a bright claret, with a black velvet collar, formerly the property of a dancing-master. The waistcoat was of black cloth, and was intended originally for a very portly citizen, addicted to turbot and turtle-

soup ; and his trousers were light blue, the ‘ cast-offs ’ of an artillery-officer. Over this dress, Bill wore a long, black linen apron, upon which he was constantly treading, which caused him to trip at every second step.

“ After closing the shutters, and fixing the bars and bolts, Bill was dismissed for the night, with strict injunctions to go straight home, and re-appear ‘ by times ’ in the morning. After he was gone, Mr. Crouch produced one bottle, two glasses, two tea-spoons, and some sugar, which he placed on a small round table before the colonel ; and then, taking a chair, he sat down opposite to him, with that sudden movement which people frequently adopt when self-satisfied.

The cork was drawn with a musical pop, and the exciting beverage gurgled from the bottle into the glasses.

“ ‘ Hot with, or cold without ? ’ asked Mr. Crouch.

“ ‘ Hot with,’ laconically replied the colonel.

“ ‘ Here’s better luck, colonel,’ said the pawnbroker.

“ No sooner had this ‘ sentiment ’ escaped Mr. Crouch, than his visiter became much agitated. An expression of rage darted from his flashing eyes, and his teeth snapped together, as he dashed the glass from his hand upon the floor, shivering it into atoms. The pawnbroker was greatly alarmed at the conduct of his guest, and looked wistfully at the door, as if for an opportunity to escape.

“ ‘ Don’t be frightened,’ said his visitor ; ‘ I beg your pardon. But those words are enough to drive *me* mad,’ continued he, pressing his fingers upon his throbbing temples.

“ ‘ I don’t mind the glass a bit ; but I *was* a little alarmed,’ said Mr. Crouch, with strong endeavours to regain his composure.

“ Another glass was got, and, after an exchange of ‘ pledges,’ the colonel commenced his story :—

“ On coming of age I was put in possession of a large property, producing an income of six thousand a year. My parents had died

just two years before, and a careful friend of my father was appointed my guardian. Considering it his duty to keep me from all possible temptation, he supplied me with but little money, and watched me so narrowly, that, up to the period of my reaching twenty-one, I was totally ignorant of what are falsely called, the pleasures of a man of fortune. Scarcely, however, was I my own master, when parasites flocked around me, to fawn upon and rob me. One would sell me a horse for six times its real value ; another would borrow large sums of me, never to be returned : and so on. Would to Heaven this had been the worst ! By mere accident I was introduced to a Mr. Horace Russel, one of those refined swindlers known by the equivocal title of ‘a man about town.’ He was handsome in person, accomplished, and truly elegant in manner. His dress was at once extravagant and neat ; his equipage dashing and attractive. On our first acquaintance, the assumed frankness of his conversation made me wish for a continued intimacy with

him. He spoke of the absolute necessity of my avoiding indiscriminate associates ; of the shameful means resorted to by sharpers to victimize young, unsuspecting men ; wished me to consider him as my disinterested friend in all matters ; confided to me his pecuniary resources, his pedigree and connexions. And I, in return for his confidence, unhesitatingly gave him mine.

“ About a fortnight after our first meeting, not a day passed without Russel being with me. At the Opera, theatre, park, indeed everywhere, he was like my shadow ; and, day by day, he so wormed himself into my confidence and esteem, that no advice or suggestion was expressed by him, but I implicitly obeyed it.

“ We were at the Opera one Saturday night, when Russel, indulging, as usual, in his quizzing remarks upon the surrounding women, suddenly exclaimed, in a totally different tone, ‘ What an angelic face !’

“ I raised my glass, and saw one of those fascinating countenances which, the more you

gaze upon them, the more you feel inclined to gaze. Leaning one arm on the front of a centre box, sat a girl simply but elegantly attired. Her hair, which was jet black, and shiny as the raven's wing, fell in careless ringlets over shoulders white as speckless ivory. Her large dark eyes were intently bent upon the stage, and she appeared to listen to each note of the magic strains with the interest of an enthusiastic novice. Her appearance was so strikingly beautiful that all eyes were directed towards her box.

“‘I must find out who she is,’ said Russel, leaving me. ‘I never saw her here before.’”

“The Opera was listened to by the fair girl with so much interest that she appeared completely unconscious of the observation bestowed upon her from every quarter of the house; and in a scene where her feelings became strongly excited, she forgot the want of its reality, and startled every auditor by uttering a loud, piercing scream. In a moment the curtain of the box was drawn, and the fair interrupter concealed from view.

“ A short time after this, I saw Russel pushing his way towards me, with an unusual degree of roughness for a locality so refined.

“ ‘ How fortunate, was it not ? ’ said he, re-joining me.

“ ‘ What do you mean ? ’ said I.

“ ‘ Didn’t you see me in her box ? ’ replied he.

“ ‘ No ; I saw you no more after you left me,’ I rejoined.

“ ‘ How strange ! ’ said he : ‘ I thought you could not have kept your eyes from such a beauty. Listen. I was peeping into the door of her box, when she gave such a cry, that involuntarily I sprung in, and, disregarding an old boy who had seized her in his arms, I charitably relieved him of his burthen. We, that is, *I*, carried her into the crush-room, where she soon recovered from her nervous agitation ; and, receiving many thanks for my attention from the old boy, and one kind look from his daughter, as he called her, the carriage was ordered. I accompanied them

to it (by the way, a very neat turn out), and received from the old boy this card, as he bid me adieu.'

" 'I wish it had been my chance,' said I, as Russel finished his adventure.

" 'Well,' replied he, 'we will call together, and see how she looks by daylight.'

" 'With all my heart,' I rejoined, hastily.

" 'Ah, ah, you sly dog! I know that,' said he, laughing. " But come, we'll leave this place for better diversion.'

" After partaking of our usual sumptuous supper, and indulging freely in wine, we proceeded in search of what Russel described as diversion. While passing a magnificent building, he asked me if ever I had been in ——'s.

" 'I never was in any gambling-house,' I replied.

" 'Don't call it by such a vulgar epithet; it's a club-house—the first in London,' rejoined Russel. 'Come, I'll shew you the interior of it,' said he, mounting the flight of steps.

" I felt a shock thrill through my frame as

I entered, for the first time in my life, a place where ruin, irretrievable, quick, and certain, weaves its clinging mesh, and snares its victims, without leaving a loophole for their escape. So flattering is the fiend presiding over the gamester's fate, that, with the softest feather, steeped in hope's most glowing colours, he severs the last thread which holds him from the abyss ere he knows that he's upon the brink.

“ Russel preceded me into the room appropriated to play, and I remarked his exchanging familiar nods with some engaged at hazard. This surprised me, for I never heard him mention that he frequented houses of this sort. I was standing at the corner of the table, which was surrounded by men, both young and old, engaged deeply in the game, when I was politely asked to sit down, by a gentlemanly-looking person. I did so, and looked round for Russel, but could not see him.

“ In a few minutes the dice-box, which was passed in rotation, came to me.

“ ‘Take the box, sir,’ said a man, offering it to me with his rake.

“ All eyes were upon me, and, with a feeling which often dictates indiscretion in youth, that I should appear silly if I did not imitate others, I drew forth a note, and, throwing it on a part of the table upon which was the word ‘In,’ broadly printed, I shook the box, and called ‘seven,’ as I had heard others do.

“ ‘Seven’s the main,’ called the man with the rake.

“ I rattled the dice and threw.

“ ‘Eleven’s a nick,’ added the same individual.

“ My note was unfolded, and two counters, with fifty marked on each, handed to me.

“ ‘Well done,’ whispered Russel from behind me. ‘Give them a benefit. Here, I’ll assist you.’

“ And, suiting the action to the word, he took one of my counters, and commenced playing. He doubled the stake, and again the box came to me. At each round I became more interested in the game, and kept increasing my stakes at each succeeding venture.

At last I would have risked all my money at a cast, had not Russel said, 'Not too fast; it's the pace that kills.'

"With fluctuating fortune, and maddened with excitement, I continued to play until the first rays of the morning sun streamed into the hot room, and the lamps became pale in the flood of light.

" 'It's time to leave,' said Russel, rising from his chair; 'change your counters; you have won enough to-night, and so have I.'

"Upon receiving money for my counters, I found I had won two thousand pounds.

"On the following morning Russel called early, and congratulated me upon 'doing the knowing ones.' He reminded me of the beauty at the opera, and proposed that we should avail ourselves of the opportunity of calling that morning. To this I readily assented.

" 'What's the name on the card?' I inquired.

" 'I forget,' replied he. 'But here's the bit of pasteboard. Sir Thomas Harcourt, Stanhope Terrace, Hyde Park.'

“ We drove to the door in Russel’s cab ; and the brief inquiry of ‘ at home ? ’ being answered in the affirmative, we entered the hall. After mounting a stone staircase, we were shewn into an elegant room, furnished and ornamented with exquisite taste. Beautiful birds were suspended in capacious cages in an adjoining conservatory filled with the choicest plants. Large globes contained the brightest fish. Drawing implements, a harp, and guitar, were also in the room.

“ In a short time the door opened, and Miss Harcourt entered with her father. At the opera, I thought her beautiful ; but how much more lovely did she appear dressed in a simple white morning-gown, devoid of any ornaments except a long string of jet beads encircling her waist ! Her figure was tall and stately. Her eyes were dark blue, fringed with long black lashes, which enviously hid most of their beaming glances. Her nose, purely Grecian, appeared chiselled by some faultless sculptor ; and, upon a neck fibred over with blue veins, her long tresses swept, parted from a forehead high and expanded.

“ After the formal introductions had been gone through, the conversation turned upon the event of the preceding night. Russel frankly admitted that he was looking into the box at the moment Miss Harcourt screamed. She laughed, and said, ‘ It was seldom she visited theatres, on account of her father’s health ; that he prevailed upon her to go, and the interest she took in the fate of the heroine made her forget where she was.’

“ Her father, a benevolent-looking gentleman, but very lame, and evidently in bad health, was much amused at the affair. He added, ‘ Emily is quite secluded here, with me and my old enemy, the gout.’

“ We remained a considerable time, and, after pressing invitations from Sir Thomas to call again, we left our cards, and separated.

“ ‘ Isn’t she beautiful ? ’ I exclaimed, as soon as we were seated in the cab.

“ ‘ Perfectly,’ replied Russel. ‘ And now you have the way clear, make the best use of it.’

“ ‘ Easier said than done,’ rejoined I.

“ ‘ Not much. Follow my advice, and it’s

settled in a month. Call again immediately ; make yourself agreeable, as you did this morning ; tell the pa' you are worth six thousand a-year, and marry her,' said Russel, with as much *sang froid* as if the affair had been arranged previously to the interview.

“ To recount the way in which I became a frequent visitor at the house of Sir Thomas Harcourt is needless. It is sufficient to say that, within a few weeks of our first meeting, Emily and I were plighted to each other, with the full consent of her father.

“ Before our marriage, I offered to settle two thousand a year upon Emily ; but her too-confiding spirit refused any settlement. ‘ I know,’ she said, ‘ it’s the custom with merchants in matrimony to barter and traffic with assumed affections ; but there must be nothing of the kind with *us*. To me it is repugnant and unnatural.’

“ It was the mutual wish of Sir Thomas and Emily that we should reside together after our union, for a long residence abroad had so impaired his constitution that the vigilant care

of his child was almost indispensable to his life.

“ Although highly connected, Sir Thomas was by no means wealthy, the chief part of his income being derived from a pension granted to him for military services to his country.

“ It was just three months after my marriage that I again entered a gaming-house with Russel. He had often said of an evening, when visiting us, ‘ Let us go and have a fling at hazard.’ But, from some cause or other, not disinclination, I had been compelled to decline. On the occasion I speak of, leaving my wife for the first time, we again went to a gaming-house. There were not more than three persons in the room when we entered, and they were not playing.

“ ‘ The bank won’t be open for two hours,’ said a man, sitting on the edge of the hazard-table, and swinging his legs carelessly to and fro ; ‘ shall we have a friendly rubber first ?’

“ ‘ I hate whist,’ replied Russel ; ‘ but we’ll have a round game, if that suit you.’

“ ‘ With all my heart. What say ye ? ’
inquired the same person of the other two.

“ ‘ What’s to be the game and stakes ? ’
asked one.

“ ‘ Loo, and unlimited, for what I care, ’
replied Russel.

“ ‘ Come on, then, ’ was the reply.

“ ‘ Will you join or not ? ’ said Russel to
me, preparing the cards with a rapid shuffle.

“ I joined the party, and we commenced.

“ I won the first three successive pools.
Flushed with success, I played at random,
while the professed gamesters, calm and col-
lected, lost and won with equal coolness. My
good luck deserted me after the first few
hands. Careless of the chances of the game,
which were narrowly watched and taken ad-
vantage of by the others, I continued to lose
pool after pool. In half an hour I was penny-
less, and, mentioning this to Russel, he said,
‘ Oh ! never mind, draw cheques, or give
I O U’s. Your luck will turn again pre-
sently.’

“ I wrote upon my cards of address various

sums as they were required, and, in the course of an hour, my case was exhausted. Pen, ink, and paper were brought, and I then drew upon my banker.

“ ‘ We shall be interrupted in this room presently,’ said Russel ; ‘ let us have a private one.’

“ We rose from the table, and proceeded to the room adjoining, where we recommenced the game. Long we sat. Hour after hour fled, and I felt sick as the glimmering lamp began to fade before the bright sun of a summer’s morning. I knew my loss must be very heavy, but the amount I knew not. Yet so desirous was I to continue the play, that I complained when Russel, who was a large winner, proposed to cease the game. The cards were thrown upon the table, and all rose.

“ I wended my way towards home just as the sun was darting his cheerful rays down the empty thoroughfares. Russel accompanied me to my house, and consoled me for my loss by saying, ‘ You’ve not lost the money ; it’s

nothing more than lent. After you are refreshed this morning, take up the I O U's, and have a good revenge in the evening.'

"Before he left me, an appointment was made to have my 'revenge' at night. For the first time I opened the hall door with a trembling hand, and a feeling of shame. I was about to creep up stairs, when a loud, convulsive sob came from the room I was passing. Upon entering it I saw my poor wife reclining upon a sofa, dressed as when I left her; her face was buried in her hands, and her breast heaved as if ready to burst. As softly as possible I said, 'Emily!' and entwined my arms round her.

"Unaware of my entrance, she screamed with mingled feelings of terror and delight. I quieted her fears, and, to her unceasing inquiries of the cause of my absence, told a lie — a first, a wicked lie. My reply was, that 'I had been watching the sick, perchance death-bed of a friend, suddenly seized with illness.' Believing me, all her suspicions vanished, and she looked the happiness through

her swollen eyes which could not be spoken. So ended my second act on the stage of ruin.

“ It would be superfluous to relate the results of my continued play after this night. Of course my wife soon discovered my infatuation for the gaming-table, and by every entreaty tried to uproot the evil passion. On her bended knees she begged of me to abstain from it, but to no purpose. I had lost thousands upon thousands, and, with a madman’s determination, I resolved to win them back.

“ Sir Thomas, becoming acquainted with my growing evil, used every argument to dissuade me from the course I was pursuing. Approaching death was hurried upon him by the anxiety he endured at my conduct; and, in a word, he died one night, while I was in deep play at a fashionable gambling-house with Russel.

“ Emily, now left solely to me for support, by her endearments and lonely situation, prevented me for a time from pursuing my ruinous

career. Day by day, however, the inexpressible longing increased — and again I went.

“ Weeks flew past with just sufficient variation of fortune to induce me to hope for a retrieval of my losses. All my money being exhausted, bills were discounted to an immense amount. At length, I was compelled to mortgage my estate ; and now, those maggots of existence, the lawyers, got hold of me. Delays, purposely occasioned, in getting money to take up my notes, brought the sheriff’s officers. Arrest after arrest took place. Heavy costs were accumulated ; and, in order to be released from a spunging-house, on one occasion, I had to assign my furniture, horses, carriages, and almost every thing I possessed.

“ I was now in the vortex. There was no retreating. My poor wife wasted away, and drooped like a plucked lily. I saw the horror of my position ; but how was I to prevent the impending ruin ? Nothing remained but a change of luck, which I felt *must* come.

“ After the assignment of my property, Russel left suddenly for Paris, not even coming to say farewell ! It was now I discovered he was in league with keepers of gaming-houses, bill-discounters, and other such vipers. Late—too late I saw that I had been the dupe of this heartless villain.

“ One night, I was pacing the little room I had taken for a lodging, almost mad with racking thoughts. Emily sat with her wan features bent upon her attenuated hands. She saw my mental agony, and, approaching me with as kind a look as ever, she suddenly fell upon the floor. I snatched her in my arms, and thought it was a fainting-fit. Her hand was pressed close to her side, and murmuring ‘ she should be better soon,’ gradually she fell into a soft sleep upon my bosom. Thus she remained for a quarter of an hour, when, starting up, she exclaimed, ‘ My heart ! my heart !’

“ God have mercy upon me ! I could hear the heavy throbs.

“ ‘ I am dying,’ she faltered, pressing her

bloodless lips to mine. ‘We shall be happy in heaven. God bless——’

“Speechless with horror, I clasped her to me, and saw her eyes becoming lustreless with the film of death. A few long-drawn sighs, and I was alone — beggared, friendless, and *alone!*

“For many weeks I was devoid of reason. At length, time and nature overcame the disease of the mind, and, with four hundred pounds, the last of my sacrificed property, I quitted London for the repose of a country village. Daily I found my little remaining money becoming less, and, desperate from circumstances, I again returned to my former haunts. Pound by pound was lost, until the last shilling was expended. I then sold and pledged the few trinkets I had remaining, till, falling from one step to another, I at last parted with my wardrobe; and sometimes, even with a single shilling, I hastened to the gaming-table.

“Not a single article of value was left except this ring. I saved it as long as any

thing remained to raise a sixpence upon. Great Heaven! this ring was——”

“The wretched creature groaned, and he clutched Mr. Crouch by the arm.

“ ‘What?’ asked the pawnbroker.

“ ‘*My wife’s wedding-ring!*’

“Even the pawnbroker felt shocked as he heard the last words. He looked at the ruined wretch, as he threw himself back into the chair, without saying a word. A silence reigned for many minutes. At length, Mr. Crouch rose, and, shaking his companion by the hand, said, ‘You shall sleep here to-night.’

“He *slept* there already, the eternal sleep of death. The sudden remembrance of the gamester’s accumulated miseries ended them, even in the pawnbroker’s parlour.”

Long before William had concluded the history of the Top-Boots, Mr. Bolton was dozing. At intervals, he caught a few words, and murmured his disapprobation at young men leaving their wives when the sun was

down. As Will ceased to speak, he roused himself from his half-slumber, shook himself, rose, and, having put on his greatcoat, lighted his lamp. “Good night, Fanny,” added he, “and mind what I tell ye—don’t let Will bark at the moon.”

CHAPTER XXII.

THE SQUIRE'S VISIT TO LONDON.

“O, sir, to wilful men,
The injuries that they themselves procure
Must be their schoolmasters.”

ON the evening of his arrival in London, the squire, soon after he had taken his usual allowance of port, summoned a busy waiter of the hotel, in the vicinity of the theatres, where he always stopped when on a visit to the great metropolis, and, with an appearance of fatigue, ordered him to bring a chamber-candle.

“Are you tired, squire?” asked Wilmott, who was sitting on a sofa with Kate, while Titley stood with Agnes in the recess of a

window, looking at the busy throng passing and repassing.

“Yes, Wilmott, my boy,” replied the squire; “I feel as cramped as a caged bird. The inside of a coach was not made for me.”

“But, dear father,” added Kate, “if you had gone outside, as you wished, the cold might have severely injured you.”

“Well, well, my love,” exclaimed the squire, impatiently; “you wouldn’t let me try it; so, there’s an end of that. Good night, girls and boys,” added he, recovering his temper as he rose to go.

Before effecting his retreat, however, he was scrambled for by Kate and Agnes, and received some very ardent salutes from both.

“There, there, ye jades,” said he, smiling, and pushing them away. “God bless you all; good night.”

“The squire’s out of his element,” said Titley, “and flounders about as I did in that fellow Larkins’s duck-pond.”

“Yes,” replied Agnes; “but I think he will get out of the mud with less damage.”

“Oh,” rejoined Titley, “don’t talk of damages. Since that unlucky fall, scarcely a week has passed, but I’ve heard of things called declarations, pleas, rejoinders, rebutters, briefs, witnesses, judges, juries, damages. Heaven have mercy on me !”

Titley’s face bore such a ludicrous appearance of annoyance at the remembrance of his lawsuit, that it was impossible to keep from laughing; and the girls and Wilmott startled the squire with a sudden peal of mirth, just as he was stepping into bed.

“In a few days all will be over,” said Wilmott.

“Yes,” replied Titley; “but what a pleasant anticipation—to be talked of, and laughed at in court—made the sport of the newspapers—and misrepresented in every particular by that rascal Fiddylee’s counsel.”

Titley was getting warm upon his subject, when Kate said, “I think, Agnes, we had better retire. Papa will expect us to rise early to-morrow, and I am sure you must be fatigued. So, gentlemen, with your leave, we’ll

take our departure. Be with us soon in the morning," continued she.

"How far is your hotel from here?" inquired Agnes.

"About a quarter of a mile," replied Wilmott.

"Come to breakfast," said Kate; "I know my father expects you."

Why should it *not* be recorded? Lips met; bright eyes darted forth tender glances; hands mingled with hands, and taper waists were clasped, as the last "good night" was breathed.

It was past midnight. Scarcely a sound was to be heard. Now and then, the roll of a solitary coach rumbled in the distance, and dying away left the dull streets wrapped in silence. The hoarse voice of a solitary watchman called the hour, as if to warn the thief of his approach, and then again all was hushed. The cold moon shed from her curtain of azure blue, studded with brilliant and innumerable gems, her bright rays upon the sleeping city. A keen, smarting breeze

whistled through the abandoned thoroughfares, and, as the consumptive child of vice crouched in the portal, she drew her tattered shawl closer, and cursed the cough that gave a hollow echo of death's decree ! The youthful rioter, senseless from excess, reeled upon the bleached pavement, and spluttered forth his empty, heartless laugh. It was the time for the contented to be at rest—for the wretched and weary to think of their miseries.

An hour elapsed after all had become quiet in the hotel, when Agnes rose from the bed on which she had thrown herself without undressing. She wrapped a cloak round her person, and, putting on a close cottage-bonnet, crept softly from her bedroom on to the staircase. Noiselessly she descended the long flight of stairs, and, by the light of a dim lamp which swung to and fro in the passage, from the current of air passing over the ill-fastened door, she cautiously proceeded to unfasten the creaking bolts.

“Is that you, Bet ?” said a sleepy voice, from a small room, close to Agnes.

“Hush !” replied Agnes, pushing open the door, and seeing a man sitting at his ease before a good fire.

“Why who are you ?” asked the man, rubbing his heavy eyelids, and staring as if an apparition stood before him.

“I am staying here.”

“Oh ! yes, miss ; I beg yer pardon, miss,” interrupted the man, rising, and bowing with anxious humility. “Shall I call the chambermaid, miss ?”

“No ; but I am going out for an hour or two, and I wish you to remain awake until my return,” replied Agnes, giving him a sovereign. “If you do so, I shall give you another when I come back.”

The man took the proffered money, and appeared as if he was in a dream. He enjoyed the salary of ten shillings a week for stopping up every night as porter, and here was a lady promising a month’s wages for one night’s work.

“At the slightest knock I expect you to open the door,” said Agnes.

“The kick of a flea would be sufficient, miss,” replied the porter.

“And not a word’s to be spoken,” said Agnes.

“Mum’s the word, miss,” replied the man, giving her an impudent wink.

Without observing the porter’s look, Agnes left the house. Across the Strand she tripped, and, hurrying up one of the cross streets, she entered Covent Garden Market. Through the crowd of men and women unloading heavily-laden waggons Agnes ran, and pulled the bell at the entrance of a large hotel. Minutes fled, but no one answered the summons. Again she pulled, when the heavy doors swung open upon their hinges.

“Is Mr. Ranger within?” asked Agnes of the individual standing before her.

“Well, now, you’re a pretty creetur for to come and disturb a feller’s rest, and to ax for gen’l’men at this time o’ night — bean’t ye?” said a little sour-looking man. “If ye’r not off in a twinklin’ I’ll have you shopped, my painted tit.”

The threatener would have closed the doors without further ceremony, had not his quick ears caught the jink of money.

"Here are five shillings for you," said Agnes; "now tell me if Mr. Ranger is within."

"Yes, marm," replied the little man, much improved in his manner; "but the gen'l'man's a-bed."

"If you will take this note to him, and bring me an answer, I shall give you five shillings more," said Agnes.

"Marm, you're very generous — may yer never want a tizzy! But it's as much as my place is worth," replied the man.

"I assure you no harm can come of your doing as I ask you," said Agnes.

"Well, marm, I'll run the risk for once. Step in here while I go," replied the man, looking round to see if they were watched. "Pray, marm, don't sneeze or cough, or I shall be cooked to a cinder," added he, in a nervous voice; "master's so 'cute to things o' this sort."

Agnes stood just on the inside of the entrance, while the man hastened up stairs with her note. She could hear the murmur of voices. A door opened; then the sounds became more audible. Did she recognize those voices? Yes; they were those of Wilmott and Titley.

“Merciful heaven!” exclaimed she, as a quick footstep descended the stairs. A moment more, and she was clasped in Ranger’s embrace.

“Come up, dear Agnes,” said he.

“Stop, Charles,” she replied; “who are on the stairs?”

“No one,” rejoined he, “except the night porter.”

“Are you sure?” asked Agnes, with trepidation.

“Quite sure,” was the reply.

Without further comment they proceeded up the staircase. Just as Agnes had reached the first floor, a door opened within a yard of her, and out came Titley. She started, and could scarcely suppress an exclamation; but,

instantly recovering herself, she lowered her head, and hurried past him.

“ Good night, Ranger,” said Titley. “ Ha, ha, ha ! I shall require a bribe to keep the secret, remember. *Bon repos* to ye. What a sly dog ! ha, ha, ha !”

Ranger took no notice of Titley’s bantering, but opened the door of a small sitting-room opposite, and secured it with bolt and lock upon Agnes. As they entered, Titley stared at them, and continued to look at the closed door with intense astonishment. He appeared as if suddenly deprived of speech and action. At length he ejaculated —

“ It could *not* be ! And yet the appearance—the very dress ; bah ! what folly !” and he turned upon his heel into the apartment.

“ Dear Charles,” said Agnes, as soon as they had exchanged many tender endearments, “ I could not wait till to-morrow. How long it is since I have seen you ; and how pale you are !”

“ But it was imprudent for you to come at

this time, Agnes," said he, half reproachfully.

"I differ with you," replied Agnes; "I should have been missed had I come in the daytime."

"Well, I must not blame you, dearest," rejoined Charles. "Tell me how you have been, and how our good uncle and cousin are?"

"Well," replied Agnes, "very well. Would to Heaven, Charles, you could be persuaded to inform him of your situation!" continued she, in a supplicating tone.

"Not yet, Agnes," rejoined he, "not *quite* yet. Daily I am in expectation of——"

"So you have been for months," interrupted Agnes. "Why not consent to see him, dispel his present fears for your safety, and render all of us happy?"

"Why must I repeat my resolution!" he irritably rejoined; "I never will meet the good old man, except as I left him—free from the stain of dishonour."

"But you *are* free from it," said Agnes.

“As *you* are,” replied he. “But not from the accusation and its withering effects. Circumstances—conclusive evidence in the opinions of those who judged me—were so strong and clear, that *you* would have said ‘guilty.’”

“No, no, no!” said Agnes; “I never could suppose you capable of a dishonourable act.”

“If you had heard the evidence, you would,” replied he. “Indeed, you must.”

“I see it is still useless to urge you,” replied Agnes; “and, therefore, we will leave the subject.”

“Pray do,” rejoined he. “I feel certain in a short time matters will brighten.”

“We must hope so,” added Agnes. “How long have you known the gentleman who addressed you in the passage just now?” inquired she.

“A few weeks only,” he replied. “Look here,” continued he, holding a candle close to his face, and exhibiting a newly-healed wound: “that gentleman saved me from being murdered.”

“Merciful Providence!” exclaimed Agnes, seeing where the frightful gash had been. “What a wound! But tell me the particulars, Charles. Where and how did you receive it?”

A slight redness spread over the features of Agnes’ brother—as the reader must have long since conjectured him to be — when this question was asked.

“Oh! in a—in a slight disturbance one night,” he replied, in a confused manner.

Agnes remarked his confusion; and the thought that Titley, too, might frequent scenes of dissipation, added to the pang.

“Titley has a friend here,” remarked Charles, after a slight break in the conversation.

“Have you seen him?” inquired Agnes.

“No,” replied he; “but I was told by him that he had.”

“That friend,” rejoined Agnes, “is Wilmott Ashley.”

“Agnes,” said her brother, sternly, “I thought you would have informed me of this before.”

“I was ignorant of their being here, and of their intention of coming, until I heard their voices in the passage,” replied Agnes. “But I hope you will consent to see Wilmott,” continued she.

“Upon one condition only,” rejoined her brother.

“Name it,” said Agnes.

“That he does not importune me to break my obstinate determination, as you call it,” replied Charles, “and to pledge his sacred honour neither directly nor indirectly to inform my uncle or any one of my arrival.”

“It must be as you say,” said Agnes, sorrowfully. “But I am certain inquiries will soon be made respecting you. No letters have been received for upwards of a twelvemonth, and I think my uncle intends going to-morrow, for the purpose of gaining information.”

“He can learn nothing until the next mail,” replied Charles; and with a smile he added, “I have provided information for him. I left a letter in India, which will be duly sent to my uncle. He must have it as soon as any news can come.”

“You will be gazetted,” said Agnes.

“Yes,” replied her brother; “if that should be seen by him, or should he discover my disgrace by any means, I leave this country for ever.”

Neither spoke for some minutes. At length, Agnes said—

“I will do all in my power to prevent his gaining any knowledge of it. I see it would only add to our affliction.”

“It would,” rejoined her brother, “if my eternal exile would be an addition.”

“Can you doubt it?” said Agnes, in a voice trembling with emotion.

“No, dear Agnes,” replied her brother. “But you are so anxious for that which I am equally desirous to prevent, I sometimes fear you will betray my situation. Forgive me if I wrong you.”

“Then fear it no longer,” rejoined Agnes. “I will use all my endeavours to have your secret kept inviolable.”

“Thank you, my dear sister, a thousand thanks!” warmly ejaculated Charles. “Give me time, and all shall be well.”

“We will live in hope,” said Agnes. “And, as you still insist on secrecy, I think it better you should not see Wilmott.”

“I have always thought so,” replied her brother.

“I will communicate to him your unalterable determination,” said Agnes; “and then I am sure he would have no great desire to see you; for his express object was to urge you to make known to your uncle the circumstances of your unhappy case.”

“That has been decided,” briefly responded Charles.

“I believe he would take no further step, with a pledge to keep all proceedings from the knowledge of his old friend,” said Agnes.

“Then he must learn no more. We must not meet, except as strangers,” replied her brother.

“Is he ignorant of your assumed name?” inquired Agnes.

“I hope so,” rejoined Charles, “or I would leave here to-night. It is unfortunate he should have come here at all. Has Titley,”

continued Charles, "been often to my uncle's house?"

"Oh! very often," responded Agnes.

"Then, you are intimate with him," said her brother.

"I have seen a good deal of him," replied Agnes, blushing, and inclined to explain her delicate position with Titley. But, from some inexplicable cause, the words died upon her lips.

Charles did not notice his sister's confusion, but said,—

"I am thinking whether he recognized you."

"I am certain he could not," replied Agnes.

"I don't feel so sure," said he. "For some time I heard him standing in the passage after we had come into this room. But, perhaps, we have nothing to fear from that, and it is foolish policy to anticipate evil."

"True," responded Agnes. "That shall be our motto, dear Charles. But there is one thing I must mention," continued she,

“which has given me great trouble. What can you want such large sums of money for? This, and your looks, have occasioned much uneasiness to me.”

Charles was silent. His tongue refused to utter a deceptive reply, and he looked the guilt he feared to confess.

“Pray speak,” said Agnes. “If you have been imprudent, be so no more.”

“God bless you, Agnes!” exclaimed her brother, clasping her to his heart; “you are too kind, and I will not deceive you. I *have* been imprudent. The same horrid infatuation possesses me—the dice-box has been my earthly, and will be my eternal ruin!”

“No, no, no!” quickly replied Agnes,—“say not so. I feared this! For Heaven’s sake, turn from the evil practice! Continue your exertions to reclaim your former honourable position in life, and become the example for men to follow, not to avoid.”

A choking sob burst from the young man’s lips—it was one of penitence and shame. There is a touching appeal in the tear

stealing from the eye of woman ; but, when it is shed by man—bold, fearless man—how much greater is the effect of the silent advocate ! Pride seals the reservoir of grief. He would rather his heart should bleed, than for his enemy to see him weep. Sometimes, however, sorrow melts the binding seal, and, in briny drops, even strong man reveals his pent-up misery.

Agnes was equally moved. She saw with what agony her brother admitted his indiscretion, and felt almost a regret at having pressed the confession from him.

“ You must not think, Agnes,” said he, “ of what I have told you, or you will begin to suspect me as others have done.”

“ Indeed, I shall not,” replied his sister. “ You told me, when we first met, that you had committed great follies of this description. I then thought, as I now do, the admission an extenuation of them.”

“ How shall I be sufficiently grateful ?” said Charles.

“ By never frequenting such scenes again,”

replied Agnes. "Oh! Charles! reflect for a moment upon what you have suffered already. Think of the situation you are now in, solely from this horrid infatuation. And remember the certain fate of a gambler—perdition itself."

"I not only promise you to abstain from the vicious habit," replied her brother, "but I swear most solemnly to do so."

"Enough," said Agnes, "I feel you will not break your vow."

"I will not," responded Charles, firmly.

"It is very late," observed his sister; "I will return."

"I'll accompany you," said Charles, throwing on his cloak.

"During our stay in London," said Agnes, "I shall come here every other night; for we cannot meet in the day."

"Cannot you come every night?" asked her brother; "I will always be at the corner of the hotel."

"The risk of discovery would be too great," responded Agnes.

“Be it so, then,” said Charles.

As they descended the staircase, Agnes heard the creaking of a door. Looking in the direction of the noise, she saw an eye fixed upon her.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE SERPENTINE IN A FROST.

“ An envious, sneaping frost,
That bites the first-born infants of the spring.”

HYDE PARK was thronged with persons hurrying to the banks of the Serpentine, to see the fleet skaters cut their fantastic figures. Rows of elegant equipages lined the edge of the river, and thousands were enjoying the pleasure bestowed by “Jack Frost.” Over the transparent ice the smooth steel glided, and the roar of countless feet, sweeping along, could be heard far away from the moving scene. Now and then, a shout announced the fall of some luckless novice, and a peal of laughter echoed in the distance.

The squire was walking close to the river,

between Wilmott and Titley. Unusual animation glowed in his features, and he was addressing the two with great earnestness.

“My dear boys,” said he, “I told you both, when my consent was asked, that I wished the girls not to throw off their maiden names too soon. I love all of ye; and nothing is so consoling to me, as to know they will have good protectors when I’m no longer here. But I don’t admire early unions; there are so many objections to them.”

“You cannot deem ours such, sir,” said Wilmott.

“Well, well! not exactly so, perhaps,” rejoined the squire; “but, still, I think you should wait with patience till the period named in the first instance.”

“My dear sir,” said Titley, “we have no patience. Pray grant our petition, for—I give you the honour of a gentleman—there’s not a grain of patience in the four of us.”

“Come, that’s honest,” replied the squire; “I believe every word of it. And since, Titley, you’ve forgotten the haw-haw, he-he

system altogether, I think it would be unjust to deny your request. Take them ; and may you be as happy as I wish ye !”

At the conclusion of the squire’s reply, his hands were seized simultaneously by his companions, and he had to endure a pressing proof of their sincere satisfaction.

“ In May, then,” observed Wilmott, “ I’m to become your son-in-law.”

“ And I your nephew,” added Titley ; “ but not *in law*, then, I hope.”

“ No, no !” replied the squire, “ you’ll be out of law by that time.”

“ I told Kate,” said Wilmott, “ of our object in getting you out this morning. As it has proved so successful, I will hasten back to impart the agreeable intelligence.”

“ I’ll join you in the expedition,” said Titley.

“ Stop, Titley,” said the squire, “ I want you to remain with me ; Wilmott can bring the girls here ; I am certain they’ll be delighted to come.”

“ As you please,” replied Titley.

Wilmott hastened away, with a promise to return as quickly as possible.

“Now, Titley,” said the squire, “I’m going to astonish you.”

“How?” inquired Titley.

“You see that dirty-looking rascal there, letting out skates,” replied the squire.

“I do,” rejoined his companion.

“Then I’m going to hire a pair of him,” said the squire, dragging Titley to a seat, and ordering the man to buckle on the skates.

“It’s nearly twenty years since I had a pair on,” observed the squire.

“Pray be very careful, squire,” replied Titley, “or they’ll run from under you, and you may chance to fall on ——”

“Don’t enter into particulars,” interrupted the squire, laughing.

After a great deal of arrangement, the squire was launched off the bank on to the ice. Wanting confidence in his capacities, he at first hesitated to make a start; but, gaining resolution, he pushed forward, and in

a few minutes he was skimming over the glassy surface, with the swiftness and gaiety of a freed schoolboy.

"I've a great mind," said he, coming to where Titley was standing, "to try the off-side edge. I think I could manage it."

"It's a dangerous experiment," replied Titley, "as you are out of practice."

"I'll make a trial," rejoined the squire; "for a fall is the worst that can happen."

He was about to attempt the feat, when Wilmott and the ladies drove up in a neat hired carriage; for the old family vehicle never made its appearance in London.

"Look!" said Wilmott; "the squire's skating."

"What!" exclaimed Kate, in surprise. "Dear father," continued she, "pray be more considerate, and come off the ice; I fear you will meet with some accident."

"Accident!" repeated the squire; and, as if inspired by the presence of the girls, he gave a sudden impetus to his feet, flourished a figure of eight, cut a circle, commonly known

as "a spread-eagle," then away he went, threading through the moving crowd, and presently became lost to view.

Wilmott and Kate walked a short distance before Agnes and Titley, and all were in the highest of spirits.

"And so you had but little difficulty with uncle?" said Agnes.

"None at all," replied Titley.

"I told Kate you would not," rejoined Agnes. "But which was the successful pleader?"

"Honours divided," replied he.

"I wonder what Mr. Bolton will say to our arrangements," said Wilmott.

"The dear old man will cry with joy," replied Kate. "Fanny told me he would allow no one about the Hall to whisper an opinion concerning our union; he considered it disrespectful."

"He is one of the best fellows living," rejoined Wilmott.

"But an eccentric being in most of his ideas," added Kate.

“ Particularly upon religious subjects,” responded Wilmott.

“ I shall write to Mr. Smit this evening,” said Kate, “ to tell him of my father’s kind consent. He is so old and good a friend, that he would consider me neglectful to keep it a secret from him, even for a day.”

“ Do so,” replied Wilmott; “ and tell him to inform the old whipper-in. It will make him happy beyond description.”

“ *You* may do so in a postscript,” said Kate.

They continued to walk along the bank for some time, without seeing the squire. So crowded was the ice, that it was impossible to recognize a person a few yards distant. Agnes had her eyes bent upon the ground, and with heightened colour was listening to her lover’s soft tale, when she heard a well-known voice address him. She raised her eyes, and there stood her brother. A slight shudder trembled through her frame, and, without knowing it, she pressed hard upon Titley’s arm.

“ Are you unwell?” he asked, seeing the altered appearance of Agnes.

“ Oh, no !” she replied, “ I am rather cold, nothing more.”

She could not refrain from looking in the direction Charles went ; but he had disappeared. Titley noticed all that had passed. With contracted brow and bewildered look, he silently proceeded with Agnes. Occasionally he was on the point of communicating his thoughts to her ; but then again they seemed so unfounded and ridiculous, that he could not make up his mind to do so.

“ A famous run I’ve had,” said the squire, suddenly emerging from a group of skaters. His face was the colour of vermillion with the healthful exertion, and he panted for breath like a pressed hare.

“ Leave off now, father,” said Kate ; “ I am sure you must be tired.”

“ Not very, my love,” replied he ; “ but I’ll come to a check ; so off with the skates, you sir,” continued he to the owner of them. “ I much question if you boys will beat that at my age,” said the squire, with pride.

“ I couldn’t do it now,” replied Wilmott.

“And now for a good dinner,” added the squire, beckoning the carriage to approach; “and I’ll try my skill upon that.”

All got into the carriage but Titley, who said he would join them in the course of an hour.

“Why not come with us?” asked the squire; “there’s room on the box, or I’ll take it, if you’re too proud.”

“That’s not the case, I assure you,” replied Titley; “but there’s an acquaintance here, whom I wish to speak to.”

He looked penetratingly at Agnes as he uttered these words, and fancied he saw her tremble slightly.

“Oh, very well,” said the squire; “then we shall see you presently;” and off the carriage rolled.

CHAPTER XXIV.

DOUBTS AND DIFFICULTIES.

“Trifles light as air
Are to the jealous confirmations strong
As proofs of holy writ.”

“WHAT makes you so dull this morning?” asked Wilmott of his friend, as they sat at breakfast.

“A sudden fit of *ennui*,” replied Titley.

“I’ll inform Agnes Scourfield of your complaint,” rejoined Wilmott; “I dare say she can devise means for dispelling it.”

“I suspect not,” responded Titley, in a tone of ill-concealed vexation.

“What!” exclaimed his companion, “do I hear correctly? Has there been one of those little interesting scenes, a quarrel, in the lover’s drama?”

"No," replied Titley; "but listen to me patiently. I fear you will ridicule what I am going to say. Indeed, the absurdity of the affair must appear to you so great, that even now I am reluctant to communicate it."

"Curtail the preface, my dear fellow," said Wilmott; "however provoking to mirth your subject may be, I will listen to it with the gravity of Tom Bolton at fault."

"Upon second thoughts," continued Titley, "I will not. If I have aroused your curiosity, calm the plebeian sensation, if you can, and excuse me."

"By all that's perplexing!" exclaimed Wilmott, "what is the matter with you? Are you moon-struck?"

"I think it not unlikely," replied Titley; "but for the present I'll keep my cause of annoyance secret. I cannot but think it must be one of imagination only, and yet to disbelieve ocular demonstration is a difficult task."

"Our eyes are not the most deceptive organs we possess," rejoined Wilmott. "But

pray reconsider your decision, and confide to me this puzzling disturber of your peace."

"No," said Titley, "I am as disinclined to do so, as a few moments since I was desirous."

"Your inclination's of the weather-vane order," replied Wilmott. "However, do as you like. But should I be of moody disposition this morning, or have occasion to rub my brow like a confused philosopher, I'll explain the reason to the ladies."

"At what hour do we join them?" inquired Titley.

"At one," replied Wilmott.

"Have you any engagement before then?" asked Titley.

"Yes," replied Wilmott; "I shall leave you now, and we'll meet at that hour in the Adelphi."

"Be it so then," added Titley, "for I've a letter or two to write."

"Should I arrive before you," said Wilmott, smiling, "shall I prepare Agnes for the ruffled state of your nerves?"

“ You’ll oblige me by not mentioning any thing that has occurred,” replied his friend.

“ I see,” rejoined Wilmott, “ there’s one who could guess a great deal from a small hint. However, I will comply with your request to the letter.”

“ Thanks,” said Titley. “ By the time we meet I shall have regained my placidity of temper. Adieu.”

“ Now to seek poor Agnes,” said Wilmott to himself, as he wended his way towards the Adelphi, “ about this mule-headed brother of hers. I hope we shall have an opportunity of a conference this morning.”

When he entered the passage of the hotel, Agnes was waiting on the stairs. She motioned for him to stop, and, hurrying down, led him into a small room.

“ Here,” she said, “ we can have a few minutes to ourselves. Kate is practising, and my uncle has gone out.”

“ To the point then, at once, for we must be as brief as possible,” said Wilmott. “ Have you seen Charles ?”

“ I have, several times, by stealth,” replied Agnes ; “ but find him as unreasonable as ever. He will not be induced to coincide with our views.”

“ When and where can I find him ?” inquired he.

“ It is not of the smallest use your seeing him,” replied Agnes. “ Indeed, he has put it out of your power. Not ten minutes before your arrival I received this note.”

Wilmott took the proffered note, and read its contents.

“ My dear Agnes,

“ Circumstances have occurred which render it politic for us to meet no more at present. I have quitted town, to join a friend just returned from India, and by whom I anticipate most important intelligence. I will write to you in a few days.

“ Your affectionate brother,

“ CHARLES SCOURFIELD.”

“ You are ignorant, then, where he has gone ?” said Wilmott.

“ Quite so,” replied Agnes.

“ What course shall we adopt ?” inquired he.

“Matters must remain as they are at present,” replied Agnes. “He was so sanguine at our last interview, of being able to clear his character from imputation, that I promised not only to remain silent, but to prevent, if possible, my uncle becoming *indirectly* acquainted with the transaction.”

“I think we shall be much blamed in the sequel,” rejoined Wilmott.

“I fear so,” said Agnes; “but nothing else can be done than to fall in with his views. If we did otherwise, knowing his fiery and determined disposition, he would immediately leave this country, and become, perhaps, lost to us for ever.”

“Did he name a probable time for this mystery to be cleared up in?” asked Wilmott.

“No defined period,” replied Agnes: “but he hoped it had nearly arrived.”

“I am bound to remain silent upon what has passed,” said Wilmott. “But so diametrically opposed am I to your brother’s conduct that I will advise nothing; nor will I listen to any thing further in the business, un-

less his uncle is to be made acquainted with it."

"I told Charles so," said Agnes.

"When the explanation takes place," continued Wilmott—"and soon it must, for I'm sure the squire will quickly learn the state of affairs—he will consider himself unjustly deceived by all of us."

"Under the circumstances, I hope not," replied Agnes.

"But I am certain he will," rejoined Wilmott. "I believe now he imagines something is wrong."

"No, he does not," said Agnes, "for a letter came this morning from India, which Charles left there previous to his departure; and it has quite dispelled all my uncle's fears. Kate wept with joy when it came, and, I've no doubt, wondered at my not expressing more delight at its arrival; for I could not assume the hypocrite to perfection."

"Then they both think he is still in India," observed Wilmott.

"Yes," replied Agnes.

“Then I must say your brother is acting a most culpable part,” rejoined he, passionately.

Wilmott saw how much his hasty observation wounded the feelings of Agnes, and scarcely had he made it before he regretted having done so. “God knows,” continued he, in a soothing voice, “I wish to consider him free from blame as you do, Agnes. But his continued obstinacy, the deceiving his best friend, the career which we have great reason to suppose he has been running since his return, and the disgrace under which he labours, whether justly or unjustly we cannot say, make me think active measures should be adopted, instead of passively submitting to his caprices.”

“I feel — I *know* he is innocent,” said Agnes. “That he has been guilty of follies, he admits,” continued she; “but I am certain no crime stains his breast. He has solemnly promised not to again commit them, and I have implicit faith in his sincerity.”

“You wish, then, to permit him to take the steps he has chosen?” said Wilmott.

“Most decidedly,” replied Agnes; “for otherwise I am convinced ruin would ensue.”

“Be it so,” rejoined Wilmott; “and may all be well, is my fervent prayer.”

“When I learned nothing could induce my brother,” observed Agnes, “to make known his misfortune to my uncle, I said you would not wish to meet him under the circumstances.”

“You were right,” replied Wilmott; “I will not see him until he’s more reasonable in his decisions.”

“You cannot be blamed for keeping the transaction from my uncle,” said Agnes. “All you know, you’re bound in honour to hold secret, which is sufficient justification.”

“I fear not the obloquy,” replied Wilmott, “but the end of all this plotting. I never think beneficial results can arise from concealed or deceptive means.”

“It is heartfelt shame that prevents Charles from being so open and candid as you wish him to be,” said Agnes. “He knows that he can but make an assertion of his innocence

against apparently indisputable evidence. Still, buoyed up with hope, he believes time will shew that which he is now unable to prove—his entire freedom from all the imputations laid to his charge, and even believed of him.”

“We will trust that such may be the case,” responded Wilmott; “no one will rejoice more than myself.”

“I believe you, Wilmott,” rejoined Agnes. “And now that we have arrived at this conclusion, we’ll join fair Kate, whom I hear warbling like one of her favourite nightingales.”

Upon going into the room, Wilmott saw the squire poring over the contents of a letter, while Kate was singing a blithe, thrilling song, with the spirit of an uncaged bird.

“Here, Wilmott,” said the squire, coming to him in a brisk trot, and thrusting the letter into his hands, “you find us as happy as kingfishers among tittlebats. Read that,”

Wilmott tried to appear gratified as he glanced over the lines; but it was a poor attempt. He folded the paper, and, returning it to the squire, murmured “that he was glad news had arrived at last.”

“To be sure, my boy, you are,” replied the squire. “Now I shall sleep again the whole of the night, and not be tossing about for half of it, as I have done for weeks past.”

“And my pale-faced Agnes will regain her long-lost roses,” said Kate, clasping her cousin to her bosom.

“Not while we remain in this smoky region, I fear,” said the squire. “But the thaw has commenced, and in another three days we’ll start for Scourfield Hall.”

“I am quite ready for the journey home,” added Kate; “I much wish to return.”

“A London life is ill suited to you,” said Wilmott.

“For a few days the novelty’s pleasing,” replied she; “but now I feel like a tethered bird longing for my wood, again.”

“You shall soon be there, my love,” said the squire, “for I’m equally anxious to get home.”

“Is our departure fixed?” inquired Agnes.

“Yes, my dear,” replied the squire; “on Saturday next we double back.”

"Titley will be glad to hear this intelligence," said Wilmott; "for, since his arrival in town, I never saw such an alteration in any man. His spirits are so depressed."

"It's a good sign," said the squire; "he'll become a thorough-going fox-hunter before next season. I know what he wants—Yoiks, for'ard! whoo-hoop! is the music to brace a fellow's nerves."

"Where's Mr. Titley this morning?" inquired Agnes.

"I expect him instantly," replied Wilmott. "He told me he should be here at one."

"We have a box at Drury Lane to-night," said Kate, "to see the pantomime. Will you condescend to accompany us little children?"

"They'll be as much pleased as we shall," said the squire. "Children, indeed! If a man couldn't laugh at a pantomime, the sooner he's run to earth the better. There's nothing on the stage like a pantomime. I'm ready to laugh and cry at the same moment, when I see one. There's that thieving, mis-

chievous rascal the clown always at some monkey-trick or other. Then old, gouty pantaloon—what fun it is to see him floored ! I enjoy it all as I did when I was a round-faced schoolboy of thirteen.”

“ But what is there to make you cry, squire ?” asked Wilmott.

“ The remembrance, my dear boy, of the same scene in years gone by ; of those with whom I roared in childish glee, now slumbering beneath the daisy-speckled sod ; and the thought, when the curtain falls, that I too may have seen my last pantomime.”

CHAPTER XXV.

THE ASSIZE COURT, AND THE TRIAL.

“Contention, like a horse
Full of high feeding, madly hath broke loose,
And bears down all before him.”

FRANCIS Fiddylee, Esq., gentleman by act of parliament, rose from his bed one drizzling morning in February, earlier than his usual custom, and proceeded to make his toilet with more than ordinary care and precision. A small kettle sang its satisfaction at its warm quarters, upon the hob of a fierce, crackling fire in the stove, and the attorney poured some of the steaming contents into a chipped teacup. Then a well-worn, well-strapped razor was produced, with a piece of coarse, yellow soap. After smearing some of it upon his chin, he dipped the stumps of

a few hog's bristles into the hot water, and with a motion which the members of a useful profession adopt when whitewashing walls, effected a lather of proper consistency. Carefully the not over-keen edge was then drawn across the stubborn crop, before a cracked looking-glass, and, after some laborious reaping, which squeezed—*mirabile dictu!*—some tears from the lawyer's eyes, Fiddylee concluded the operation of shaving—an operation it is difficult to fancy a lawyer performing without thinking of his clients.

The extreme corner of a towel was now moistened in the cup, and carefully drawn over the stiffened corners of his eyes, and the scraped portion of his countenance. With a fresh dip he damped the backs of his hands, paying particular attention to the wrinkles of his knuckles; and then, after a general dry-rub, the attorney considered himself washed and shaved.

A calico shirt, with linen wristbands, was taken from a chair before the fire, and put on with extreme care, in order that the starched

frill in front might not be disarranged. A thick, greasy, bone comb then separated his combined locks, and pulled them back from his low, pointed forehead, excepting one, which was left to curl in that graceful form not unfrequently seen upon the brows of butcher boys. A white cravat was then drawn round his thin neck, and tied in a widely spreading bow. Wide, drab trousers were pulled over a pair of thick shoes; and cotten stockings peeped in relief between them.

“There!” exclaimed the attorney, regarding himself in the glass with a satisfied air; “I’m of opinion that would do for Westminster Hall.”

He then arranged a silver watch-guard over a buff-coloured waistcoat, and, slipping on a blue coat with large gilt buttons, announced his toilet complete, by a triumphant application of his pocket-handkerchief.

“I wish that chaise would come now,” said he; “for I’ll breakfast when I get there. A po’chaise!” continued Fiddylee, with the

proud look of a hero—"a *yellow* po'chaise ! Ah ! that's the way for gentlemen to travel ! None o' your common stages for we members of the learned profession. Exclusive vehicles—yellow po'chaises for us—especially when we are sure of making other people pay for them."

The attorney was getting excited with the reflection of his dignity, when the rumble of wheels caught his ear. On looking out of the window, his eyes flashed with pleasure at beholding a carriage, of the description mentioned, with a postboy mounted, in a blue jacket and white hat.

"Here it is," said Fiddylee. "Now for the glory of the assizes !"

A quick rap came at his chamber-door.

"Come in," was the order.

"Please, sir," snuffled a lad, with a chalky face, making his appearance, "your coach is awaitin'."

"Where's the blue bag, Mr. Bubbs?" inquired the attorney, who invariably thus addressed his clerk, for effect.

“Cram full o’ dummies in the coach, sir,” replied the sagacious Bubbs.

“Where’s the green one, sir?” asked his master.

“Chok full o’ big books, sir, in the coach,” said the boy.

“And where’s the red bag, Mr. Bubbs?” asked the lawyer, with a smirk and a titter.

“Cram full o’ papers *in re* Larkins *versus* Titley, sir,” responded the boy.—“All in the coach, sir.”

“That’s well,” rejoined the attorney. “Now, go down and open the carriage-door, for I’m ready,” said he, drawing on a pair of white cotton gloves. “Say, if any clients call, I am at the assizes, and be sure you pop their names down in the day-book. We mustn’t have them call for nothing.”

“I’ll mind, sir,” rejoined the clerk.

Fiddylee bent forward in the chaise, as it rattled through the village, in order that he might be seen by his inimical neighbours. Nothing gains the temporary approbation of the vulgar so effectually as display. Those

who would have hooted at the unpopular attorney at another time, regarded him with looks of favour, as he was whirled along at a dashing pace, in a yellow "po'chaise." This effect was not lost upon Fiddylee, who, by the time he arrived at the assize town of Weston, was on the very best of terms with himself.

"What's to pay?" inquired he, alighting at the door of the "Swan and Neck of Mutton."

"The stage is ten mile, sir," replied the driver, "at one and threepence a mile."

"There's the money," rejoined Fiddylee, counting the silver into his hand.

"Postboy, sir, if you please," said the lad.

"Ah!" exclaimed the attorney; "that's a charge not allowed on taxation, I think."

The boy stared.

"Let me reflect," said Fiddylee. "A gratuity to driver, so much. No," continued he, "that item would be struck out. I can't do it."

"You don't mean that, sir, do ye?" said the boy, with a doubting stare.

“Decidedly I do,” replied Mr. Fiddylee.

“What! nothing for driving of ye?” persisted the boy. “Who ever hear’d tell o’ that? Why! it’s all I gets, ’cept my grub. But you don’t mean it, Mr. Fiddylee!”

“I tell you it wouldn’t be allowed on taxation. I should have to pay it myself!”

This last reason seemed almost as decisive to the postboy as it evidently was to the lawyer, and, after a sulky pause, he at last appeared to acquiesce in it, leaving the room with a sneer of inexpressible contempt, and a half aside, “Well, *you’re* a nice gen’l’mán, I don’t think.”

Had Fiddylee heard the various opinions uninterruptedly expressed of him by the disappointed postboy, during the entire two hours that he remained in the yard of the “Swan and Neck of Mutton,” he would have had sufficient grounds to maintain half a dozen actions for defamation.

A strong waiter seized the heavy bags, and skipped after the attorney into the hotel.

The following morning, a few minutes be-

fore nine, Fiddylee squeezed himself through a crowd of anxious-looking persons into the body of the court. As he entered, bearing the red bag in his hand, and followed closely by a porter with the others, he was glanced at eagerly by two young men, wearing new wigs and unworn gowns, sitting on a back seat appropriated for briefless members of the bar. One of them had a very fat, red face, which, being sprinkled over with red spots, led the observer to conjecture that "cold without" was more palatable to him than Coke upon Littleton, or Blackstone's Commentaries. The other was a little man, with thin wire spectacles, balanced upon the end of a turn-up nose. His wig inclined to the left side, and he looked so incapable of being abashed, so shrewd and keen, that the attorney at once decided upon him for the junior counsel.

"I say, Vellum," said the little barrister to his friend, "there's something in the trap, I think."

"Bah!" exclaimed the other, resting his chin upon his thumbs; "not for us."

The attorney arranged his three large bags before him, placing those with the dummies and books on each side, while the one containing the legitimate lumber occupied the centre. Diving his hand into it, he extracted a thick brief, and approached the expectant counsel.

"Your name, sir," said Fiddylee, with his blandest smile.

"Sharp," replied the barrister, bowing.

"Mr. Sharp, five guineas," said the attorney, taking a pen and endorsing the brief.

The virgin may gaze at her betrothed with delight, and the mother may look at her first-born with ecstasy, but neither can derive more pleasure than the barrister does when he eyes his maiden brief, and "fingers the fee." With shaking hand Sharp signed his name, and slipped the money into his pocket.

"Who am I with?" he inquired.

"Sir Thomas Bluster," replied the attorney.

"How do we stand on the list?" asked the barrister.

"Fourth from the top," replied Fiddylee

“ Directly Sir Thomas comes, we’ll have a short consultation,” continued he.

Now the bustle of the court commenced. Jurymen hastened to the box; witnesses blocked up the passages; gowns rustled along as the counsel took their seats; attorneys and their clerks rushed to and fro; opposing suitors looked all uncharitableness at each other; and, with bows from the bar, and gapes from the mob, the judge, robed in scarlet and ermine, took his seat.

“ Silence,” roared the usher, striking his wand sharply against a desk, “ silence in the court.”

“ D’ye think we’ll gain the day, zur?” inquired Humphrey Larkins.

“ Hush!” replied his attorney, “ you mustn’t speak now.”

“ Well, but d’ye think we’ll gain the day, I axes ye?” again asked his client, puffing forth a strong effluvia of beer.

“ Silence there!” hallooed the usher.

“ You be dom’d!” replied Humphrey. “ I wull speak if I loikes.”

All eyes were bent upon the delinquent. The judge peeped over his spectacles, and in a moment more Humphrey Larkins would have found himself in durance vile ; but Fiddylee dexterously clutched his client by the arm, and dragged him out of the court.

“ You’ll ruin me,” gasped the attorney, gaining the street.

“ The sooner the better, you cur,” said a voice close to his ear.

The lawyer turned, and there stood Mr. Bolton, with a frown upon his brow that might have caused stronger nerves to tremble than the attorney’s.

Scarcely had Fiddylee proceeded a dozen yards from Mr. Bolton, when he met the squire, Wilmott, and Titley, walking side by side. Truth must be told. A slight, *very* slight red tinge spread itself over the lawyer’s features, and he felt, for the first time in his life, ashamed of himself. The three passed him with averted looks, and entered the court.

“ Go into that public-house,” said Fiddylee to his refractory client, “ and wait there till I come or send for you.”

“ Let’s have a drop for good luck afore ye go, master laryer,” said Humphrey.

“ Not now,” replied the attorney ; “ wait till it’s over.”

It was just two o’clock ; and the old whipper-in was getting tired of standing in the closely-crowded court, when “ Larkins against Titley” was bawled out by a man with a strong voice.

“ May it please your lordship and gentlemen of the jury,” commenced Mr. Sharp, “ this ——”

“ Wait one moment,” interrupted Sir Thomas Bluster ; “ I’ve not seen my brief. Where can it be ?” he continued, turning over a large heap of papers upon the table before him. “ I’m retained in this case, I believe.”

“ Yes, Sir Thomas,” replied his learned friend ; “ my brief is so endorsed.”

“ Ah ! yes, yes ! here it is,” rejoined Sir Thomas. “ Proceed, sir, proceed.”

The pleadings were opened in form by Mr. Sharp, and Sir Thomas, at the same time, threw his eye over the sheets of his brief, and

glanced at the proofs. Having accomplished this task, he made a few notes, and took a pinch of snuff. "Some of our witnesses, Sir Thomas," whispered Fiddylee, "are reluctant ones."

"Humph! ah!" exclaimed Sir Thomas.

"Most are opposed to us," said the attorney.

"So much the better," responded Sir Thomas; "I admire them. The case stands a greater chance of success, sir, with such witnesses."

The attorney sat down between his blue and green bags, and when Sir Thomas rose to state the plaintiff's case, regarded the advocate with profound attention. At the conclusion of the customary prelude, Sir Thomas said, "In the whole course of his professional experience, no case had come before him where the rights of a free-born Briton had been so shamefully infringed as in the one he was about to submit to their attention. For ages, long since swept into the abyss of oblivion, it had been the triumphant, unfading ivy-twined wreath in our glorious constitution,

that an Englishman's home was his castle; his broad lands, won by his ancestor's heart's blood, sacred from the trespasser's destroying foot-mark. What could be more gratifying than this sublime law, affording its sheltering wing for the poorest cottager, as well as the rich and estated earl? what more criminal than a wanton disregard of it?"

Sir Thomas paused, and gave a professional look at the jury, to discover the effect he was producing. Two or three of the wooden-faced gentlemen in the box were discussing the probable price of barley on the ensuing market-day; one was peeping at a newspaper, slyly placed in his hat; and two more were comparing samples of oats. The advocate saw the want of attention in the dispensers of justice, and, giving the table a loud smack, continued, at the top of his voice—

“Gentlemen of the jury!”

Each one started, and fixed his eyes upon the counsel.

“As twelve free and enlightened subjects of this realm, sitting there,” said Sir Thomas,

pointing to the box, "sworn before the Ruler of events to give a verdict according to the evidence produced, and your own irreproachable consciences, I ask you—can there be any act committed where the offended laws have greater reason to demand retribution?"

The barrister again stopped, and the jurymen, thinking themselves personally appealed to, began to elbow each other; and, before Sir Thomas could resume, the foreman started up, and said, "My brother jurors, sir, think that, of the two, a bloody murder is somewhat worse."

The judge screwed up his grave mouth, the barristers grinned, the people laughed, and Sir Thomas smilingly replied, "That was certainly a matter of opinion."

It was some time before order could be regained. At length silence was restored, and the counsel proceeded.

"I will now state the simple facts," said the barrister, "and proceed to support them by indisputable evidence. The plaintiff is an honest, industrious, and sober farmer." (This

last attribute, as applied to Humphrey Larkins at the moment in question, was more than doubtful.) “The soil he tills belongs to him, and, although not wealthy, he is one of that respectable class—an independent landholder. The defendant, according to my instructions, is a gentleman much devoted to field sports, particularly to fox-hunting.”

Here a “Ha, ha!” was heard from a sonorous voice.

“Hush, governor!” said William, clapping his hand over his father’s mouth, and effectually checking Mr. Bolton’s loud laugh. The officers were directed to discover the disturber, and eject him; but the old whipper-in escaped their vigilance.

“I say, Titley,” whispered the squire, “you’re an immortalized Nimrod.”

“Wait a moment,” said Wilmott; “he’ll be proud of his description presently.”

Sir Thomas Bluster then described, in glowing colours, “the desperate manner in which fox-hunters ride, the mischief they frequently occasion to the land, the fences they break

down, and the necessity for making them adequately compensate for all damages caused by their reckless sport." He then detailed the immediate cause for this action, and at last arrived at the important point of Titley's introduction to the duck-pond.

"Gentlemen of the jury," continued the learned counsel, "can your fertile imaginations picture a more startling effect than this produced among the geese and their interesting progenies, the goslings! I venture to anticipate your reply in the negative. Perchance—and it is not an extravagant conjecture—they never ventured into the water again with their former happy confidence. Indeed, I have a witness to prove one gosling was never seen to damp its feet afterwards. This is a serious subject for reflection! And I trust your verdict, this day, will prove, to an admiring public, that even a goose shall not be disregarded by the fostering laws of this great country."

"Is my learned friend alluding to the plaintiff?" inquired Titley's counsel, a tall, thin

gentleman, with a pointed nose. There was a sneer about his lips which signified a capacity for snarling.

“ I am alluding to his wrongs, sir,” replied Sir Thomas ; “ I am stating the shameful injuries he and his property have sustained, sir ; I am advocating the cause of the oppressed, sir, before the most immaculate earthly tribunal this sublunary planet can boast of — an English court and jury. And, with the full assurance that my appeal will not be made in vain, I leave my client’s case in the hands of those who never turn an unwilling or indifferent ear to the claims of justice.”

A murmur of approbation ran through the court as Sir Thomas took his seat.

“ Thomas Bolton,” said Mr. Sharp, rising.

“ Thomas Bolton,” bawled the usher.

“ Thomas Bolton” was carried from mouth to mouth, and resounded through the court, and the passages leading to it.

“ Here, here ! ” replied the old whipper-in, briskly stepping forward. “ What are ye all yapping for ? I’m not deaf.”

His lordship looked in astonishment at Tom as he mounted the witness-box. His appearance was certainly novel, for nothing could prevent him from attiring himself in his scarlet coat, tops, cap, and spurs. To an exposition of his son's, he replied, "It was a professional matter, and as such he should adopt the costume."

"You swear —" said a man, offering Mr. Bolton the book.

"Only when I'm in a passion," interrupted Tom.

"Silence in the court!" bawled the usher, as fresh symptoms of laughter exhibited themselves.

The oath now was administered to Tom, and, when he was told by Mr. Sharp to stand forward, and look at the jury, he turned up the cuffs of his coat, as if preparing for a little self-defence, instead of an examination as a witness.

"You're whipper-in to Mr. Scourfield, I believe," said Mr. Sharp.

"To the squire's pack o' crack hounds I

am," replied Mr. Bolton, proudly, "and was before you were hatched."

"Come, sir," rejoined Mr. Sharp, sharply; "answer my questions respectfully, and don't digress."

"I never crane, swerve, or flinch," responded Tom; "so lead away."

"Were you acting in your capacity on the fourteenth of last February?" inquired the counsel.

"I was; and a splitting run we had," replied Tom.

"Was the defendant with you?" asked Mr. Sharp.

"Mr. Powis Titley certainly was at cover," replied the old whipper-in.

"Do you remember any particular occurrence that took place on that day?" inquired the barrister.

"I should think I did," replied Mr. Bolton, looking hard at the judge, and winking his left eye.

"Relate it," said the counsel.

"I'd rather not," replied Tom.

“But I insist, sir,” rejoined Mr. Sharp.
“You are bound to reply.”

“Well, if I must, I must!” rejoined Mr. Bolton. “But it’s cruel to gaff a willing jade. Mr. Titley was well trounced for his ignorance, and it’s too bad to repeat it. He *was* only fit to line a bandbox, but he’s regular built leather now.”

“No digression, sir. State the particulars,” said the counsel.

“The long and short of the matter is, then,” replied Tom, “he tallyhoed a squirrel perched in a tree.”

“And what then?” asked the barrister.

“He was made sport of by the gentlemen o’ the hunt,” rejoined Mr. Bolton.

After some other unimportant answers from the old whipper-in, he was asked if the defendant followed the hounds.

“Against his will, if he did,” replied Tom; “but, as I don’t carry eyes in my back, I didn’t see.”

Nothing more could be extracted from Mr. Bolton. “He didn’t know, and he didn’t

see," were the general replies to all the questions put to him. In vain the junior counsel snapped like a dog at the reach of his chain ; in vain Sir Thomas Bluster took the witness from the inexperienced junior, and by every trick and manœuvre tried to browbeat Mr. Bolton into giving a supporting answer to the plaintiff's case. All was useless ; and Tom was told " he might go down," by the enraged counsel, in the sort of voice that is used to dislodge an interloping cur.

" I have nothing to cross-examine *him* upon, I think," observed Titley's sarcastic advocate.

William was next placed in the box ; but, after some whispering between Sir Thomas and Fiddylee, was told to " go down."

" Call John Chawbacon," said Sir Thomas.

" John Chawbacon !" echoed far and wide ; and, shortly after the summons, John Chawbacon made his appearance.

" What is your occupation, Mr. Chawbacon ?" inquired Sir Thomas, after the witness had been sworn.

“Ize be ’orsekeeper an’ ploughmun to Master Largins, zur,” replied John.

“Very good,” said the barrister. “Now think before you reply to my questions.”

The witness had been well drilled by Fiddylee. For weeks he had repeated the same story, and the united talent of the English bar could not have varied a single word. It had been a task of great difficulty for John’s brain to take possession of the instructed facts; but, once in, nothing could effect an ejection of them.

“Was ploughing on the fourteenth of last February—remembered it, because it was St. Valentine’s day—sent a valentine to his sweetheart. Saw Squire Scourfield’s hounds on that day. Saw the fox—knew it to be a fox, and not a donkey. Saw the dogs and huntsmen in pursuit. They made a great noise—liked a noise, and hallooed himself hoarse. All were dressed in scarlet, except one—that one was the defendant. None came over his master’s land but defendant. Never saw any man so desperate before—rode at everything

he came at—cleared two drains and a water-furrow. Saw him bear towards the pond, and flog his horse cruelly. Was sorry for the animal, and glad to see the rider floored in the duck-pond. Believed it served him right. Never saw ducks, geese, and goslings, so frightened before. Believes some had fits, two died, and one never would take a swim again. Caught defendant's horse—took it to him—received half-a-crown for the job."

"That's my case," said Sir Thomas, taking his seat.

"You have said the ducks, geese, and goslings, were greatly alarmed," remarked Titley's counsel, rising to cross-examine the witness.

"Every veather stood on end," replied John.

"Pray, how do you know they were not drakes and ganders?" asked the counsel.

"How do I know you bean't an old woman?" replied Mr. Chawbacon, sulkily.

"You may go, friend Chawbacon," rejoined the barrister.

The counsel then commenced the defence. Long he dwelt upon the facts as they really took place, and much he regretted there was no evidence to support them. A man's intentions were often difficult to prove; but still they were not always to be discredited, because they needed facts to bear them out. He assured the jury his unhappy client was as averse to a dip in the mud as they themselves could possibly be, and was quite as frightened at finding himself in the duck-pond, as the ducks and geese were at being driven out of it. It was a pure accident that caused his immersion; not any inclination of his own. He begged the jury to remember we were not at all times free agents. And, when we were not so, was it "seasoning mercy with justice" to hold us responsible for our actions? They would say no. The defendant was a trespasser against his will, and was absolutely pitched into the present mess. He spoke figuratively, and was not alluding to the mire, but to the law, which was quite as capable of dirtying a man's fingers, and blackening his

character. What man, referring to the simple fact, would voluntarily stick his head into the mud! He believed there was not such an eccentric being living. Never in the course of his practice did he feel greater confidence that justice would be triumphant. He should not trespass upon the attention or time of the court any longer; but leave his case in the hands of the intelligent jury he had the honour of addressing.

His lordship summed up, and the jury found a verdict for the plaintiff, damages five hundred pounds.

CHAPTER XXVI.

LOVE AND ANGLING.

“O, how this spring of love resembleth
The uncertain glory of an April day,
Which now shows all the beauty of the sun,
And by and by a cloud takes all away!”

UPON the flowerless ground the sun streamed his bright rays, and a soft wind fanned the face of Nature, as she woke from her winter's trance. The young gay morn broke over hill and dale with flashing beams; the gurgling brook danced in the flood of light, and sparkled in its radiancy. There was a buoyancy in the air which lifted the spirit of life. It was the bursting of spring from ice-bearded winter's cold embrace; the severing his last tie from the chilled earth.

“I think no more about it,” said Wilmott, to his friend Titley, as they wended their way from Woodland Rookery towards the Hall; “it’s all settled now.”

“The deuce it is!” replied Titley; “my solicitors, Twist, Screw, and Ruinem, have a different opinion, I think.”

“Their opinions correspond with mine,” rejoined Wilmott, “or I am much mistaken.”

“How so?” inquired Titley.

“They received a blank cheque immediately after the trial, to defray the costs and damages,” replied Wilmott.

“Really, this should have been named to me first,” rejoined his friend; “I’m sincerely obliged to you ——.”

“Stop, stop,” interrupted Wilmott, “your thanks are not due to me.”

“To whom, then?” inquired Titley.

“To the squire,” replied Wilmott; “and, if you wish to please him, you’ll express your obligations as briefly as possible.”

“But I cannot accept this,” said Titley.

“Nonsense,” rejoined Wilmott; “if you tell him so, he’ll be greatly offended.”

When they approached the Hall, they saw the squire standing at the window of his sporting repository, fixing a reel upon a fishing-rod. The casement was open, and Kate was leaning with her clasped hands upon one of his shoulders, while Agnes occupied a similar position upon the other. Directly the squire saw his companions coming, he sung out —

“Come away, come away to the stream,
And we’ll try the fisherman’s skill,
By hooking the jack and the bream
In the pool at the side of the mill.”

“Well done, squire!” said Wilmott; “you sing like a May-bird.”

“And feel like one this morning, my boy,” replied the squire; “here’s delicious weather.”

“Papa’s wilder than a goshawk to-day,” said Kate; “we can do nothing with him.”

“To be sure ye can’t,” replied the squire; “they’ve been trying to take my rod from me, Wilmott, and playing all manner of tricks, the

minxes; but I made them call peccavi, the rogues!"

"Do you fish this morning?" inquired Agnes of Titley.

"I said I would," replied he; "but, if you can bear with resignation my society, I should prefer remaining here."

"I think we can do so," replied Agnes, smiling, "can we not, cousin?"

"It will not be too much for our patience, I believe," replied Kate.

"Do as you like," said the squire; "if you prefer stopping at home, do so. If not, Bumstead and Striver have prepared your tackle."

"His nerves have not become settled from the shock they received in court," observed Wilmott.

"I'll not have another word spoken about that," said the squire; "let the subject pass as if it had never been."

"But I must say something to you concerning it, squire," said Titley.

"Not a syllable," replied the squire, waving

his hand ; “ I’ll not hear a word more of the affair ; so don’t vex me by attempting it.”

“ Why stay there, gentlemen ?” asked Kate ; “ we have not forbidden your presence.”

“ Stop where you are, Wilmott,” said the squire ; “ or we shall not get away till noon.”

Bumstead, Striver, and Button now appeared ; the two former carrying landing-nets and baskets ; the latter bearing himself with dignity, close to the heels of his master.

“ All ready ?” asked the squire.

“ Yes, sir,” replied Peter, touching his hat.

“ Who’s got the minnows, frogs, and mice ?” inquired the squire.

“ I trapped them, sir,” replied Striver ; “ here they are,” said he, pointing to the basket slung over his shoulder.

“ Here’s your rod, Wilmott,” said the squire, handing him one out of the window.

“ I’ll be with you in a moment.”

“ Mr. Titley is far more gallant than you are, Wilmott,” said Kate, pouting.

“Nay,” replied he; “I thought you deemed me perfection, in gallantry.”

“Not I, indeed,” she rejoined. “You are too constantly occupied in sporting. Scarcely a morning do you pass with me, while Mr. Titley is as seldom from us.”

“Shall I sham a headache, and decline going with the squire?” said Wilmott.

“Do,” replied Kate, laughing; “it will be such fun.”

“Now then, Wilmott, come along,” said the squire, emerging from the hall, armed for the piscatory sport.

“Sudden indisposition, my dear sir,” replied Wilmott, “prevents my accompanying you this morning.”

“What!” exclaimed the squire, amazed.

“Sudden indisposition,” rejoined Wilmott, putting his hand to his head; “a pain here.”

“I see—yes, yes,” rejoined the squire. “Well, well! make yourselves happy. I shall be home at four. A pain here! ha, ha, ha!”

And off the squire started towards the river, followed by Peter, Striver, and Button.

“Where did you see this fresh water shark?” inquired the squire, as they walked along the bank of the stream.

“In deep ripple hole, sir,” replied Striver.

“What do you think he weighs?” asked the gamekeeper.

“Twenty pounds, if an ounce. Don’t he, Button?” said Striver, with his usual appeal to the sagacious Button.

“Why, you don’t think the dog knows any thing about the weight of fish, do ye?” inquired Peter.

“Better than many a Christian,” replied the old trapper.

For half a mile their way was on the verge of one of the most beautiful brooks in England. A double row of willows drooped their graceful branches upon its bosom, and mingled with the rapid stream as it swept murmuring along. Thick, yellow osier-beds reared their waving forms upon one side, as far as the eye could reach, while acres of tall rushes rustled in the breeze on the other. Here the heron would stand and watch for his finny prey; the teal

waddle among the hiding flags, and the moorhen pick her slimy meal. It was the spot of all others for the wild denizens of the stream—a rude, uncultivated, solitary place.

“He laid just there, this morning, sir,” said Striver, pointing between two patches of green rushes.

“Shall I try him with a frog?” asked the squire.

“A minnow would be best, I think,” replied Peter.

Striver produced the little pink from his store, and commenced baiting a hook with great ingenuity, while Button sat on his haunches to watch the proceedings.

The squire examined his reel to see if it was free, and, when all was ready, he gathered the line into a neat coil, and made a cast across the stream. Slowly he drew it towards him, and when about the centre there was a sudden check to its course. In an instant the line flew through the rings, and the reel whir-r-rd round with great velocity.

“He’s got it,” said Striver, rubbing his hands with delight.

“ And a thumper he is,” added Peter, watching the proceedings.

Yard after yard of the twisted cord continued to roll away, and the squire, full of excitement, clutched the bending rod with both hands as it yielded to the force. Much of the line was expended before the reel stopped, when the squire, inclining his rod, began to wind it up. Scarcely, however, had he given two or three turns, when again the fish started and whirled the reel round at its former rate.

“ He’ll not be taken in a jiffy,” observed Striver, “ will he, Button ?”

Button was too much occupied in the sport to pay any regard to the question. On the edge of the bank he stood, with pricked ears and stiffened tail, to observe the squire’s generalship in landing the pike.

“ He’ll take away all the line, sir,” said Peter.

“ Not he,” replied the squire.

Again the fish stopped in his career.

“ He’ll come much nearer this time, you’ll

see," said the squire, carefully winding up the reel.

The line was becoming tight, and the squire had some little difficulty to gather it in, when, with a tremendous spring, the pike leaped several feet out of the water, and started off once more at astonishing speed.

"That's a thirty pound fish," said the squire. "And if he's landed within half an hour it will be good work."

"We shall get this under him," said Peter, holding out the landing-net, "before that time, sir."

"I think not," rejoined the squire, "by his pranks."

To and fro the fish was played by the scientific squire, who never appeared more flushed with pleasure.

"I'll have you," said he. "You can't escape."

"He's gorged the bait, sir," said Striver.

"I see he has," responded the squire; "it's all right."

"Shall I try and get the net under him

now, sir?" asked Peter, as the fish appeared within reach.

"No," replied the squire; "I'll manage it all myself. I've hooked him, and I'll land him."

The struggles of the pike now became less violent. Occasionally he lay still upon the surface of the water, and permitted himself to be drawn quietly towards the shore; then, with a sudden strike, down he dived, and lashed the water into a white foam.

"He'll die game," observed Striver.

"As a bull-dog," added Peter.

"There's not much more run in him," said the squire. "Stand close to me with the pole."

The fish was dragged once more to the top of the water, which he continued to dash with his fan into a thick spray.

"He's not beaten yet, sir," said Peter.

"There's another stroke in him, I think," responded the squire.

He was right in his conjecture. When within a few yards of the bank, the pike

gave a jump, and darted away with the same vigour as at the moment he took the hook. But it was his last struggle. Presently, flapping his tail, the exhausted fish suffered himself to be drawn along; and, when within reach, the squire took the landing-net from Peter, and placed it under his captive.

“There,” said he, with the gratification of a successful sportsman, “you’re mine.”

Upon the bank the gaping pike was drawn, and exhibited a form of great dimensions.

“I’ll bet a glass of ale,” said Striver, “he’s over thirty pounds.”

“Ah!” exclaimed the squire, “you may say five over.”

“It was more than half an hour’s work, sir,” observed Striver, looking at his round silver watch.

“How much more?” asked Peter.

“Five minutes,” replied Striver.

“And quick work too, for such a fish,” added the squire.

Peter lifted the fish, and, leaving it in the

net, hoisted it upon his back. Striver assisted the squire in arranging the tackle; and, at the conclusion, the party took their way towards home.

“Have you seen any more otter seals?” asked the squire, looking at a mud-bank.

“No, sir, thank God,” replied the old trapper.

When the squire departed upon his fishing excursion, Titley and Agnes strolled through the pleasure-grounds, leaving Kate and Wilmott in the breakfast room. As they proceeded, Titley became thoughtful and silent; and Agnes, in a playful manner, questioned him about the cause of his moody muteness. For some time he evaded giving a reply, but at length said —

“I think it right you should know, although you’ll laugh at me.”

“If my spirits were not unusually good this morning,” replied Agnes, “I would promise to abstain from such an indulgence; but, as they are, you must bear with me.”

“I am sure you will give me credit for

believing," rejoined he, seriously, "that I could scarcely mistake another living person for yourself."

"I know of nothing to prevent my entertaining such a belief," said Agnes.

"And yet," Titley hesitated, "on the night of our arrival in London I saw some one in our hotel so strongly resembling you, that the impression really haunts me. I cannot but think of it."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Agnes, with feigned surprise; but her voice faltered, and she bent her face towards the ground.

Nothing more was said for a few moments, and Titley was more puzzled than ever at the manner of Agnes receiving his communication. Instead of treating it with ridicule, as he expected, she seemed confused and grave.

"It's very strange," observed he, communing with himself.

"What's very strange?" said Agnes, recovering her self-possession.

“That I should have been so deceived,” he replied, “for I *must* have been, of course.”

“Do you wish me to say that I followed you to your hotel?” asked Agnes, forcing a smile upon her features.

“No,” replied he, “if you did not.”

“*If!*” rejoined Agnes.

There was a frown upon her brow, and her eyes flashed with indignation as she uttered this. Titley felt awkward, and replied that the deception was so great, he had since thought, and could think of nothing else.

“Then pray make the attempt,” responded Agnes, “for I’m certain you can be far more agreeably employed.”

“We’ll dismiss the subject then,” said Titley; “but I never was so mistaken. It appeared to me that I saw you as clearly as I do now.”

“And did you think seriously I was there?” inquired Agnes.

“No,” replied he, “I did not. But we met, by accident, in Hyde Park, a person with whom I am slightly acquainted; and

——, but no matter; there's no occasion to explain."

"But I think there is," said Agnes.

"To do so will only add to the absurdity," responded Titley.

"Well," rejoined Agnes, "if you fear to state the particulars of this dream, I must excuse you. But no more of these illusions, remember."

"Forgive my folly," said Titley; "I'll not trouble you or myself with them again."

Through the bright, green laurels they walked, and the sun began to decline before their steps were bent homeward. As they passed from the shade of an old, thick holly-bush, they saw the squire approach, with his trophy of success.

"Come here, Titley," hallooed he. "Ah! you should have seen the sport I had with that fellow," said the squire, pointing to the pike suspended in the net.

"What a monster!" exclaimed Agnes.

"He must have given you some trouble," observed Titley.

“ Trouble ! ” repeated the squire ; “ some of the best fun I ever had in my life. By Jupiter, he pulled like an ox.”

“ Weighs five an’ thirty pounds, ma’am,” said Striver. “ Don’t he, Button ? ”

CHAPTER XXVII.

BRIGHTENING PROSPECTS — A RUN WITH THE ROYAL HOUNDS.

“True hope is swift, and flies with eagle’s wings;
Kings it makes gods, and meaner creatures kings.”

“AND all will be explained, Anstruther,” said Charles Scourfield, to a sallow-complexioned, tall, and thin young man, with straight, black hair hanging in heavy masses over his ears.

“I’ve no doubt of it,” was the reply, in a languid voice. “If I had not been so confoundedly croaky, nothing should have induced me to have left before the court-martial was over. But——”

Here a short, dry cough interrupted the speaker.

Charles sat at the head of a sofa, placed before a fierce fire; upon the sofa reclined his companion. The apartment was small, and very hot; but the invalid shivered occasionally, and complained of cold.

"You had better resolve to start for London immediately," said Charles. "There's not a doctor to be trusted in Portsmouth."

"With this bilious fit I dare not attempt the journey," responded his companion. "But in a day or two I shall be better."

"How did the voyage suit you?" inquired Charles.

"The thought of it is enough to destroy me," replied Anstruther. "I did nothing but wish myself dead, from the hour of sailing until I landed."

"But you're better now?" rejoined Charles.

"Not much," said his companion.

"The pure air of England will soon restore you," added Charles.

"Perhaps so," responded Anstruther; "but I'm so shaken that I almost despair of it."

“Never despair,” said Charles. “Remember the ordeal I have passed.”

“Ay,” replied his companion, with a melancholy shake of his head, “you have iron nerves, and spirits of cork. But I was always a poor subject for a vertical sun to dart his rays upon, and to bear the knocks and rubs of wayward Fortune.”

“We frequently fear the shadow more than the substance,” rejoined Charles. “I have endeavoured to shrink from neither, and have generally found reality has not a tenth of the real trouble which anticipation pictures.”

“You are right,” said Anstruther. “In ninety nine cases out of a hundred this is so. Still there are exceptions; and I am one.”

“Nonsense!” said Charles. “But come, don’t let us talk of troubles. Not three days ashore in Old England, after ten years’ absence, there should not be a thought but of pleasure and happiness.”

“And there shall not be to-night,” re-

sponded his companion, energetically springing from his recumbent attitude. "No! Charles! I brought you glorious intelligence, and to-night I'll forget my own sorrows to be happy with you."

"Well said," added Charles. "I feel satisfied your health will be restored within a few months; so let's tell old tales, and forget our cares."

"With all my soul," responded his companion. "We'll have a jug of burnt claret, and smoke like Turks. But no hazard, eh?"

"Not a throw," said Charles, firmly. "I told you of my promise; and, by Heaven, I'll keep it!"

"Do, my dear fellow," added Anstruther; "and I'll try to imitate your excellent example; although a little 'chicken' is very tempting."

"And very ruinous," said Charles. "If I had not given way to its influence how many trials should I have escaped!"

"It was a villanous conspiracy, and not the play, which distressed you. Remember,"

said his companion, "all injuries should be traced to their legitimate sources, and not thrown upon extraneous ones."

"Still, I must trace all my troubles to the dice," replied Charles. "If I had not gambled, the heartless scheme could not have been practised."

"Some other might, equally shameful," rejoined his companion: "and, perchance, one that would not have been discovered as this must, and is by this time."

"Thank God!" exclaimed Charles, clasping his hands fervently. "I thought—I *knew* it would! Against the cold dictates of probability, I felt that truth must burst through the clinging cerements of artifice and baseness."

"Shall you inform your friends now of the circumstances?" inquired Anstruther.

"No," replied Charles; "I shall wait until I hear the result of the trial. Then," said he, seizing his companion's hand, "we'll go to the old Hall together, and make the roof ring again. How I wish to meet them!"

“I see no reason for your keeping aloof now,” rejoined Anstruther. “I can bear testimony——”

“Yes, yes,” interrupted Charles; “but I have decided to remain as I am until every thing is clear and settled.”

“You’ll inform your excellent sister of the events that have transpired,” said his friend.

“Not exactly,” replied Charles. “I shall state to her the certainty of an early consummation of my hopes; but not the circumstances in detail.”

“Why not?” asked Anstruther.

“Because she would not be able to conceal her delight,” responded Charles. “And I am determined to have the affair maintained as it has been, till the proper hour arrives for disclosing it.”

“As that cannot be long, perhaps you are right,” rejoined his companion. “But I should be so anxious to join them at the ‘old house at home,’ that I should not act with such caution.”

“Shall I ring the bell?” inquired Charles.

"Yes," replied his friend. "We'll make ourselves comfortable, if my cough will permit."

A brisk little waiter, with a napkin under his left arm, answered the summons.

"A jug of burnt claret," said Anstruther.

"Yessir," answered the waiter.

"Let it be well spiced," added Charles.

"Yessir."

"And bring some good cigars."

"Yessir."

"I wonder if any of those bipeds can say no?" observed Anstruther, as the waiter closed the door.

"It's a rare occurrence to hear," said Charles.

"I'll ask him, when he returns," added Anstruther, "to express a negative."

When the waiter brought in the jug of smoking claret, Anstruther said to him, seriously, "Pray did you ever say 'no' in the course of your life?"

"Yessir," replied the waiter.

"Then you *can* say 'no?'"

“Yessir.”

“Will you oblige me by saying ‘no?’” asked Anstruther.

“Yessir,” again replied the waiter.

“Then do so,” said Charles.

“Yessir,” still persisted the waiter ; and he was dismissed without expressing a negative, amidst the loud mirth of his interrogators.

“We have discussed the Indian news,” said Charles, offering a cigar to his friend ; “and I’ve told you all that has occurred since my arrival. What shall we do for amusement?”

“Spin a yarn,” replied Anstruther, pledging his friend in a bumper.

“I’m the worst in the world for that, as you know,” replied Charles ; “and *you* are among the best when your spirits and health will let you. Will you try one now?”

“Why, this wine has revived me,” replied his companion ; “and I think my cough will not offer any great interruption.”

“Then give me one of your sporting pranks,” added Charles.

“With all my heart,” responded Anstru-

ther. "Draw near, so that I may not be obliged to speak too loud."

Charles placed a chair close to his companion, who, knocking the ashes from his cigar, commenced the following adventure, premising that it was a simple relation of what he had witnessed with his own eyes:—

"It was about a year previous to my going abroad, that I went to the inn at Salt Hill, one cold and dreary night, early in March. The host received me with a profusion of smiles and bows, holding the stirrup while I dismounted, and offering to see my horse attended to, whilst I obtained those consolatory indispensables — refreshments. But a sportsman's maxim being to attend to the wants of his horse ere he thinks of himself, I declined the offer, and proceeded to the stable with my favourite.

" 'A likely hanimal, this 'oss, sir,' said the little bandy-legged ostler.

" 'Yes,' replied I; 'there never was a better; the rasper cannot be too great, or the run too long.'

“ ‘ So I’d a hidea, from his shape an’ make, sir,’ rejoined he; ‘ bit of a warmint, tho’, I suspect.’

“ ‘ High-couraged; but an excellent temper,’ said I.

“ ‘ Them’s my pips!’ exclaimed the ostler. ‘ Nothing like blood an’ bone, from the king to the ’oss, sir.’

“ ‘ The meet will be great to-morrow,’ I observed. ‘ Have you any gentlemen sleeping here?’

“ ‘ Only one, sir. Our stables, however, are full o’ ’osses, and, taking the lump, I never seed greater clippers. But,’ added he, laughing, ‘ I suspect some on ’em ’ll shake their tails afore to-morrow at this time; for old Ripley’s to be turned out, I hear.’

“ ‘ Indeed!’ said I.

“ ‘ Yes,’ responded my loquacious friend. ‘ That ’oss next to yourn,’ continued he, ‘ belongs to the gen’lman wot’s sleeping here. A very spicy kid he is, and no mistake.’

“ I looked at the animal, and, to my delight, saw it was my friend M’Donald’s pic-

ture of a horse. He was a superb creature; his blood as pure as that of the Ptolemies, and his silky coat black and shining as polished jet. His limbs were perfect symmetry, shaped in Nature's faultless mould.

“ ‘That's the only horse coveted by me in preference to my own,’ I observed; ‘and still, I think, Whitefoot here can do as much across a stiff country.’

“ ‘A uncommon good match they'd be, by what I can judge, sir,’ responded the ostler. ‘Howsomdever,’ said he, addressing the horse, ‘you're done up for this night, my fine feller, and, if I don't mistake, you'll be *done up* to-morrow night.’

“ On proceeding to the house, I found M'Donald, sprawled upon a couple of chairs before a roasting fire, joking with a pretty, smart chambermaid, who was holding a candle and warming-pan. As soon as he saw me, he sprang up, and, seizing my hand, said, ‘My dear Anstruther, how are you? I was just going to my dormitory, for I had nobody to talk with except Susan here, who began to

get tired. Susan, my dear, take away that candle and sheet-warmer ; we intend being very comfortable previous to availing ourselves of your kindness. Now, my boy, for the feast of reason and the flow of soul.' ”

“ After discussing some excellent viands, and due quantities of foaming ale, we commenced relating anecdotes and adventures over a bowl of capacious dimensions, containing a fluid composed of extreme opposites—sweets and sours, strong waters, and waters unadulterated ; in other words—glorious punch ; better, I swear, than that undefined compound—ambrosial nectar ; only it was not ladled out by that queen of ladlers, the evergreen Hebe.

“ I told you, proceeded M'Donald, that I am to be married this day week. Well—just before the adventure* I am going to relate to you, I made Ellen a solemn promise—a *lover's* promise, remember ; a thing of the pie-crust order—made to be broken—that I would never hunt any more. But, on the

* The details of this adventure are literally true.

occasion in question, I had set my heart on a run. What was to be done? To state my wish to Ellen in direct terms was out of the question; so I took a lesson out of Reynard's own book, and proceeded by stratagem. 'Ellen,' said I, 'you must persuade your father to take you to the hunt on Thursday.'

" 'Papa has already offered to do so,' she replied; 'but I shall not go unless you accompany us.'

" 'Nothing would give me so much pleasure,' I rejoined; 'but promising you never to hunt again, of course, it is impossible.'

" 'But you can ride with us and see it,' she added.

" 'Ride in the carriage and *see* it!' I exclaimed; 'it would break my heart; and,' said I, in an under tone, just sufficient for her to hear, 'it will almost do so if I keep away.'

" God bless her! If you could have seen her at that moment; she looked so beautifully unhappy. I felt such a rascal. Her large blue eyes filled with tears; but—Heaven for-

give me!—I weighed to-morrow's sport against her tears, and they were found wanting.

“ ‘ You wish to ride,’ she said, ‘ do you ?’

“ I gave her a kiss, and whispered, ‘ If you will consent this once, it really shall be my *last* hunt.’

‘ Morning is beautiful everywhere.’

“ I awoke about six. The glorious orb of day was just tinging the sky with varied and glowing hues. The refreshing tears of morning sparkled brilliantly upon Flora's lap. The birds were singing joyously their matin thanksgivings, setting a worthy example to beings of a larger growth. In plainer language, it was a very fine morning.

“ Upwards of fifty noble horses were being paraded in their hoods and clothes round a paddock in front of my window. My horse was among the number ; and, as he proudly arched his neck, and disdained to touch the earth with his daisy trimmers, I determined he should this day win a wreath, by putting his best leg foremost.

“ Carriages, tandems, buggies, gigs, dog-

carts, donkey-carts, every description of vehicle, from the ancient and dilapidated to the most dashing four-in-hand, now came rattling to the door.

“Here he comes, here he comes!” shouted the assembled crowd.

“Five or six hundred yards from the inn, a beautiful carriage, with four horses, approached. The harness was ornamented with silver coronets, which glittered in the sun; and, as if conscious of their attractive appearance, the high-blooded animals lifted their feet nearly to their chests as they came tearing along. It was the arrival of the master of the hounds and his friends, consisting of young and sporting noblemen.

“Preparations were now made for the sport. Some were mounting, others were dismounting against their inclinations; and, as a new disciple of Nimrod found himself biting the dust, loud laughed the merry crowd, much to the discomforture of the fallen hero.

“M'Donald was talking to some ladies in a carriage, when his horse plunged forward,

and, from some fright, became very restive. He reared upon his haunches, whirled round and round, snorted with distended nostrils, and his eyeballs seemed to dart forth fire. At every plunge he approached the carriage again, where the ladies were sitting speechless with terror. The gallant rider appeared glued to the saddle, and used every exertion to prevent nearing the spot where the ladies were. The horse's fury increased, and, when within a few feet of the carriage, finding no other means left, M'Donald plunged the rowels deep into his flanks, and, lunging him with all his power, hurled the excited creature to the ground.

"One of the ladies screamed, 'He's killed, he's killed!' and sank fainting upon the seat of the carriage.

"But M'Donald, to the astonishment of all who witnessed the accident, was not in the slightest degree injured; and, disengaging himself from the stirrups, he struck the prostrate horse, and, making him rise, mounted again, as if nothing had occurred, amid innumerable cheers and compliments. He pro-

ceeded to the carriage, where I joined him, and found the lady who had fainted, a young and lovely girl, just recovering from her fright. The dazzling brilliancy of her eyes was most striking, increased, no doubt, by the excitement she had undergone. Her lips were white with fear, and, although suffering from intense emotion, a more beautiful creature I never saw.

“ ‘Ellen,’ said M‘Donald, “don’t be so alarmed, I am not injured. Come, come, let me introduce my friend to you.’

“As I bowed, and saw the unshed drops swimming in her eyes, I thought the pleasure of a day’s hunting ought not to be purchased at the price of such tears.

“ ‘Pray,’ she said, addressing me, ‘prevail upon him not to ride that mad wretch, for I, apparently, have no influence. Oh, do not!’ she exclaimed, clasping her hands beseechingly, ‘pray do not, Donald.’

“ ‘Ellen, do not be so childish. You gave me your consent to ride, and, because the Cardinal had a caper, you now wish me to look

like a man-milliner, and get into that bandbox of a carriage. A pretty exhibition I should make,' replied M'Donald, somewhat irritated.

" 'Do as you please, Donald,' she rejoined. 'But really you make me most unhappy.'

" He then went close to her, and, leaning upon the side of the carriage, whispered something, which in a moment made the anxious girl appear consoled and happy. Her features beamed with sunny smiles, and all remains of tears were at once dispelled.

" I entertained little doubt but that it was a promise not to proceed, but merely start with the hounds, for the sake of appearance. This, however, was only surmise.

" Lord ——, with his gold dog couples slung across his shoulders, the badge of master to his majesty's buck-hounds, gave the signal for the sport to commence. At least five hundred gentlemen, dressed in scarlet, and mounted on the finest horses, lined the road to where the deer-cart was stationed, in the centre of a spacious grass field. Numerous carriages and crowds of pedestrians surrounded it. At

some short distance, the royal hounds were placed, with the huntsman and whippers-in, splendidly accoutred in scarlet and gold.

“ Expectation being raised to the highest, the word was given for the deer-cart to be unfastened. Open flew the door, and out leaped the noble stag. He paused for a moment, and stared at the surrounding multitude; then, turning slowly his erect head, he sniffed the wind, and, stretching out his pliant limbs, bounded off like a winged arrow from a yew bow. Away he scudded, topping wall, brook, and hedge, without brushing the tallest twig.

“ I lingered near where M'Donald's devoted Ellen sat, and, as he was leaving the side of the carriage, I saw her give him a searching look.

“ ‘ Heaven preserve you, Donald!’ she said. ‘ Remember your promise.’ But he could scarcely have heard what she uttered; for, the moment his horse felt that he was to move, he bounded in the air like an antelope, anticipating the enjoyment he was about to have.

“ ‘ Hold hard, gentlemen,’ shouted the huntsman. ‘ Plenty of time ; let ’em get at it.’ ”

“ In a few seconds on swept the deep-toned, musical pack, realising Somerville’s beautiful description :—

“ ‘ Hark ! from yon covert, where those towering oaks
Above the humble copse aspiring rise,
What glorious triumphs burst in every gale
Upon our ravished ears ! The hunters shout,
The clanging horns swell their sweet, winding notes,
The pack wide opening load the trembling air
With various melody ; from tree to tree
The propagated cry redoubling bounds,
And winged zephyrs waft the floating joy
Through all the regions near.
The puzzling pack unravel, wile by wile,
Maze within maze.’ ”

“ My horse required, as usual, coaxing and caressing to be persuaded to remain behind the majority ; for, believing the run would be great, I endeavoured to curb his impetuosity as much as possible. But the numbers sweeping past caused him to pull and fret, until the perspiration trickled in streams from his glassy coat, and the soaked reins slipped through my fingers as I fruitlessly pulled upon him. On

he was determined to go at his own pace, and on he rushed. Losing all control over him, the mad but noble creature carried me with the swiftness of an untrapped pigeon. Over desperate and unnecessary leaps he whirled me, proud of his prowess, and reckless of consequences. At length I soothed him with my voice, but not sufficiently to guide him. A railed fence was within a few yards of us, to which he was making a direct course. The speed at which he was going was alone sufficient to render it impossible for him to clear it. As we neared, however, I gave him his head, and, striking my spurs deep into his sides, he bounded from the earth, and pitched me head foremost to the ground.

“Heaven only knows how far I was sent; but it appeared to me I should never reach the ground. Millions of stars flashed in my eyes, as I rose on my knees to discover the damages. Blood was flowing, which, upon examination, proved to proceed from the prominent feature of my face. I got up from the ground, and found my horse standing un-

injured, gazing stedfastly in the direction of the hounds; his sleek ears were pricked forward, and large drops of sweat rolled from his body, and from his fetlocks a clear stream trickled to the earth. I examined my limbs, and, finding them whole and sound, with the exception of some slight contusions, I again mounted. Not a horseman in sight; not a sound to be heard. I listened and strained my ears to catch a sound that might lead me in the direction of the chace; but all had gone far, far away.

“After sitting for a few minutes in my saddle, I prepared to return, thinking my pleasure was at an end. While slowly proceeding down a lane, I caught a distant cry, and felt assured it was the deep-toned note of the baying hound. I galloped in the direction of it, and, clearing a thickset hollybush fence, I saw the object of pursuit, the antlered stag, flying along the bank of the Thames. I halted, and watched him. He stopped at intervals, and seemed undetermined what course to take to baffle his relentless pur-

suers. At length he drew back from the verge of the stream, and rushed towards it; then, suddenly stopping upon the brink, he turned his head in a listening posture.

“The hounds could now be heard distinctly approaching, when, gently gliding into the water, with his head thrown back, he buffeted the rapid stream, and, landing on the opposite side, he continued his rapid flight. The hounds came to the spot where the stag took the water, and were at fault, not discovering immediately what course he had taken. I was not anxious they should find it out very soon, feeling the effect of my tumble still ringing in my ears.

“The flower of the field now arrived; all the cocktails were shaken off, and the select few left in their glory alone. In a handful of moments, the leader, a gallant old hound, placed his nostrils to the water’s edge, and gave one deep, beautiful cry, as much as to say, ‘this way, my friends,’ when all obeyed the mandate by springing into the river, and following the track of their victim. But, if

the dogs were so willing and ready to wet their coats, the sportsmen were not.

“ ‘ What *shall* we do ? ’ inquired a gentleman in a bright and spotless pink coat.
“ ‘ There’s not a bridge for seven miles.’

“ I took my horse quietly to the edge of the bank, and, giving him a pat on the neck, set the example of the quickest mode of crossing the water, by going into it. After a little difficulty in reaching the other side, I jumped from his back, and, scrambling up the bank, safely landed. My horse placed his fore-feet on the side, and sprung out with a loud neigh, much pleased at regaining the shore.

“ M‘Donald now approached on the Cardinal, covered with white foam. Without hesitation he urged his horse to take the water ; but, to the evident annoyance of his master, he unequivocally declined a swim. Whip and spur were applied with the effect of creating only a few decided kicks and plunges. M‘Donald became enraged at his refusing, and began to apply the tormentors without mercy, but all to no purpose.

“ Finding force of no avail, he determined upon stratagem. Dismounting, he tied his pocket-handkerchief over the horse’s eyes, and, taking him thus blinded about thirty yards from the river, drove him towards it at full speed. Over the bank they fell with such force, that both sunk in an instant, and remained under water for some time. When they came up, the horse commenced plunging violently, and M‘Donald endeavoured to reach over his head to take off the handkerchief; but from the maddened creature’s struggles, he could not accomplish it. At length, M‘Donald rose in his stirrups, and, stretching out as far as possible, almost effected his object, when, losing his balance, he fell over the horse’s head, taking the reins with him. From some unaccountable misfortune these became entangled round his body, and prevented his disengaging himself from the blind and struggling animal. The horse, infuriated with fear, raised himself out of the water as far as possible, and with short jumps dragged his ill-fated master with him. Both hurried along

with the rapid current, while every exertion was being used to render assistance. The horse rolled from one side to the other, snorted and plunged ; till at last, worn out with violent and useless exertion, he buried his head between his knees, and both sank, leaving but a few air-bubbles to rise and burst, where, but a moment before, one loving and beloved, in the exuberance of manhood's strength and beauty, gasped for life thoughtlessly sacrificed.

“I galloped to the nearest cottage for assistance. The frightened cottager followed me with ropes, with all possible speed. When we arrived at the river, upon the edge lay the lifeless body of M'Donald. His pale and ashy countenance was turned upwards, upon which the beams of the sun glowed faintly. By some means he had been taken from the water, and a vein had been opened. But alas ! the heart refused its functions ; the blood refused to flow. I thought of Ellen, the beautiful, heart-broken Ellen ; and (shall I confess it !) tears came to my relief. Others around followed my example ; and there might be

seen the rough hunter brushing the tear of sincere sorrow from his cheek, for the fate of the gallant M'Donald."

"Is this adventure unimbellished?" inquired Charles.

"A plain truth, unvarnished with fiction," replied Anstruther.

"What became of Ellen?" said Charles; "how did she receive the direful intelligence?"

"I heard," replied his companion, "that she never spoke afterwards, and never shed a tear. The morning following the death of her lover, she was found gazing at his miniature; at least they *thought* she was; but the eyes were dim and sightless. She was dead; her heart had withered, like a beauteous flower, blasted by lightning. *very good*

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE WIDOW BEWITCHED.

“ Love’s heralds should be thoughts,
Which ten times faster glide than the sun’s beams,
Driving back shadows over low’ring hills:
Therefore do nimble-pinion’d doves draw love,
And therefore hath the wind-swift Cupid wings.”

THE two chimney-corners of Mrs. Tiggles’s apartment, which served for “a kitchen, a parlour, and all,” were occupied respectively by her hopeful son Jack, and his friend Peter Bumstead, the surly. The former was engaged in twisting some waxed thread about the bleached bone of a chicken, yeleft the “merry thought,” to construct, for his own special amusement and edification, an instrument known as a “skip jack.” The latter sat with his hands crossed upon his knees, and looked vacantly upon the industrious fingers of his

companion. A thoughtful cloud hung loweringly upon the gamekeeper's brow, and a continued restless movement of his hobnailed boots upon the snow-white hearth showed that Peter's feelings were not of the tranquil order. Now and then he cast an oblique glance at Mrs. Tiggie, who, with extraordinary care, was crimping the bosom-ruffle of his favourite shirt. The good dame's red, round, healthy face glowed with unusual radiance. Upon her lips a smile of triumph played, and, as she knew that Peter's impassioned gaze was bent upon her, a gentle sigh heaved from her capacious but tender bosom, and Mrs. Tiggie softly murmured that "she felt she didn't know how."

"I can't stand it no longer," ejaculated Peter, suddenly rising from his chair, and assuming an attitude worthy of Demosthenes himself, "I can't stand it no longer," he repeated, "or I shall bust."

"What!" exclaimed Jack.

"Bust," replied Peter, firmly, bringing his heavy fist with a crash upon the trembling table.

“Mr. Bumstead,” said Mrs. Tiggles, in a faint voice, “you put me all in a twitter.”

“And me in a devil of a shake,” added Jack, afraid he was about receiving payment for an old score; “pray what have I done now?” inquired he.

“Nothing, my dear John,” replied Peter, in such an affectionate tone that it even startled himself.

“Nothing, my dear John,” repeated Jack, with his mouth wide open, and his eyes stretched to the utmost limit of their capacities. He had never before been so addressed by Mr. Bumstead; and the change alarmed him.

“No,” continued Peter, “and, if you had, I wouldn’t lick ye now; not for your mother’s sake.”

Jack was confounded. He looked at Mr. Bumstead for an explanation of this sudden change which had come over the spirit of his actions, and a slight conception bubbled in Jack’s cerebrum that the gamekeeper’s brain was not entirely free from the thick fumes of strong ale.

Mrs. Tiggles folded the finished shirt, and sighed again.

“ Ah ! ” responded Peter. He tried to imitate the sound ; but the attempt was more like the grunt of a discontented pig, than the echo from a lone-worn heart.

A pause ensued. Jack still continued to wonder, and was about interrogating for the cause of all these startling effects, when, after some unsuccessful attempts, Peter’s courage became screwed to the speaking point.

“ How would you relish a father, my dear John ? ” inquired he, taking the labour-hardened hands of Mrs. Tiggles between his own, and blushing the colour of a scraped mangel-wurzel root.

“ I don’t want no fathers,” replied Jack, gloomily, a sudden light breaking through the misty mystery. “ I’ve had one, haven’t I ? No one wants two on ’em, I suppose,” continued he.

“ The nestling hand of a parent,” said Peter, “ is——”

“ Any thing but a light un,” interrupted Jack, tapping his shoulders significantly.

“ But I wasn’t a parent on them occasions,” argued Peter.

“ That’s a fact,” observed Jack.

“ Nor you a son,” said Mr. Bumstead.

“ Very true,” added Jack ; “ particularly when I soused you at the otter-hunt.”

“ Ah, you playful rogue ! ” replied Peter, lifting his foot, and inflicting the slightest possible kick upon Master Tiggles’s extreme rear.

“ Well, mother,” observed Jack, “ what do you say to giving me another father ? ”

“ *Say !* ” exclaimed Peter, placing one arm round the portly waist of the widow, and folding the other to his bosom. “ Would she break her Bumstead’s heart ! would she skin his tender soul, and tree it like a trapped tom-cat ! would she collar a doe hare in April, and strangle her like a blind mongrel pup ! would she gaff a spawning salmon ! would she foot a pheasant’s nest ! would she—— ”

“ No, no, no,” interrupted Mrs. Tiggles, bathed in melting tears, and hiding her moistened cheeks in her Bumstead’s waistcoat.

“ I knew it, my cooing wooddove,” rejoined the victorious Peter, snatching a kiss from the willing Mrs. Tiggle’s lips. “ Cruelty, thy name ain’t woman,” poetically remarked the excited Bumstead, concluding the chaste salute.

“ So I *am* to have another dad, am I !” said Jack. “ It’s a wise child, I’ve heard, as knows his own father,” continued he. “ But, when a chap has a couple on ’em to pick from, that doubles the odds.”

“ Shake hands with your parent that is to be,” said Mr. Bumstead in an uncertain voice. Something appeared to have risen suddenly in his throat ; he was becoming visibly affected with the solemnity of the occasion.

“ Honour him,” observed Mrs. Tiggle, with an admonitory shake of her head, and pointed finger, “ that your days may be long in the land——”

“ My governor ploughed, and mother gleaned in,” said Jack, cutting short his esteemed parent’s lecture. “ So tip us your fin, dad the second.”

The first friendly grasp was exchanged by the mercurial Jack and his intended father-in-law.

“ Wonders will never cease,” said the former, withdrawing his tingling fingers from Peter’s clutch. “ Who ’d have thought we should have shaken paws a few days since ?”

“ A christian would,” replied Mrs. Tiggle. “ Ah, Jack ! you should pay more regard to what the parson says. Doesn’t he tell us when we are smited on one cheek, we should offer the other to be smoted ?”

“ In course he does,” coincided Peter ; “ in course he does.”

“ Then why don’t you make a profit by what he says, Mr. Bumstead ?” asked Jack. “ I’m a-thinkin’ you never coaxed me to stick a quill in your left calf, after I’d shoved one into the right, eh ?”

“ No,” replied Peter, rather tripped by Jack’s argument. “ But then, you see, a-a-a calf ain’t a cheek.”

“ Certainly not,” said Mrs. Tiggle, with a sagacious smack of the palms of her hands,

“certainly not. A calf can’t be promiscuously called a cheek.”

“That don’t signify,” argued Jack; “what he means is, we oughtn’t to kick for a bruised shin, but let t’other have a whack patiently.”

“It’s agin all natur’ to have one’s shins kicked without squalling,” replied Mrs. Tiggle; “so he can’t mean that.”

“You are such a plain woman, mother,” said Jack; “you can’t take the road from a direction-post without it travels with you.”

“A plain woman, am I!” replied Mrs. Tiggle, adjusting her cap. “I’m in hopes all folks don’t think so. And as to travelling with direction-posts—the only post I remember travelling with, was with you to market last week.”

“Famous!” ejaculated Mr. Bumstead; “haw, haw, haw! famous! Why, Jack, my son that is to be, your dear mother was down upon you, like a swallow upon a gay-fly.”

“You’ll find her sharp enough,” rejoined Jack, “or I’m much mistaken.”

A gentle tap at the door here attracted their attention.

“Come in,” said Mrs. Tiggles; when the door swung open upon its creaking hinges, and exhibited the figure of Mr. Bolton upon the threshold.

“Good evening, sir,” was Mrs. Tiggles’s respectful salutation, as she bobbed a curtsy, and stood with ready hand to usher her guest into the room.

“The same to you, marm,” replied Tom, touching his hat, and striding into the apartment.

Jack rose from his chair, and, shaking a stuffed cushion to make a soft seat, invited the old whipper-in to occupy it.

“He’ll make a good un yet,” said Tom, giving Jack a pull of the ear; “when his knawing days are over.”

“How do you find yourself this evening?” inquired Peter.

“Getting more coltish every hour, I believe,” replied Tom. “Nothing but weddings now-a-days, eh, Mrs. Tiggles? Ah!

you need n't put your head in that flour poke
—I know all about it."

"It's settled," audibly whispered Peter.

"Settled! of course its settled!" rejoined Mr. Bolton. "I'm settled — every thing's settled. I shall dance on my head when all these events come off. I feel that Time's hour-glass is turned; the old codger is running the sand through once more for me. I'm no longer the old whipper-in, but young Tom Bolton, a harum-scarum, random, helter-skelter, tearaway, flyaway, dashing, splashing, rascal. That's what *I* am," concluded he; but when he would have done so, had not his wind been expended, it is difficult to say.

"Now, Mrs. T." resumed Tom; "when are you to be christened Mrs. B., eh?"

"Lor', sir," replied Mrs. Tiggle; "how absquatuated you make a body feel, to be sure!"

"Absquat—what!" said Mr. Bolton; "isn't it natural for a body to feel a sort of a queer all-overishness on the eve of a wedding, I should like to know?"

"In course it is," replied Peter; "in course it is, Mr. Bolton. I feel a wonderful rum sort of a tittilation in all my sinies."

"Sinews, Peter, sinews," observed Mr. Bolton, with a patronizing air.

"I meant sinews," rejoined Peter, humbly; "we were just coming to the day, sir, when you knocked," continued he.

"Then it isn't fixed," said Mr. Bolton.

"No, sir," replied Mrs. Tickle; "I can't say the precise day to-night."

"Then I'll do it for you," said Tom. "This day month's the ticket. It's the last day o' the season," continued he, with an elongated visage. "The very last run before summer has darkened the sprouting corn. Oh dear me!" sighed the old whipper-in, "it's like going to a funeral. One's spirits can't rise on a blank day, and what day so blank as the last day o' the season! Not one in the almanack."

"But I shouldn't like you to be out of condition on this occasion, sir," said Peter.

"The greater the drain, the more necessary the supply," rejoined Tom; "if a man is

down upon his hocks, he requires more stimulants, than if he was going it cheerily on his daisy-trimmers."

"Well!" observed Mrs. Tiggles, spreading a coarse, but ivory-complexioned cloth upon the table; "I won't be a stumbling-block to the arrangement; so let it be this day month."

"Bravely said," added Tom, and, rising from his recumbent attitude in the easy chair's embrace, he pulled from his pocket a large square silk handkerchief, and, after wiping his lips with scrupulous care, with a very grave and matter-of-course expression of countenance, he seized Mrs. Tiggles in his arms, and imprinted a loud kiss upon her fat and rosy cheek.

"That's a sauce mother's palate hasn't been tickled with a long time," said Jack.

"The greater relish, then," replied Tom, screwing up his lips, as if they had enjoyed a luxury.

A dark thunderish appearance hovered about Mr. Bumstead's features when the old whipper-in's lips smacked together. An unusual

phosphoric light flashed in his eyes, and he looked as if enduring the animal-magnetic influence of the green-eyed monster. This effect was not lost upon Mr. Bolton, who, with a broad honest laugh, said—

“None o’ your bristles, Peter. These feathers,” pushing his fingers through his few grey hairs, “are too thin and seared for that. A toothless hound doesn’t travel far for a ——.”

“Lady,” interrupted Peter, anticipating with fear the sequel of Mr. Bolton’s simile.

Tom smiled at the gamekeeper’s suddenly acquired refinement.

“You’re right,” rejoined he; “but still he’ll bend his shanks to one o’ the pack, or he’s not thorough-bred.”

During this discussion, Mrs. Tiggles and Jack busied themselves in preparing the refreshments. A boiled fowl was almost done to a hiss in the saucepan; sliced potatoes crackled and snapped in a frying-pan; some rashers of bacon steamed fragrantly between two plates; a tin pan of roasted cheese sent

forth its strong fumes reeking to the ceiling, and with some fancifully moulded fresh butter, Mrs. Tiggle's culinary display gave promise of no ordinary share of creature-comforts for Peter's future life.

Jack vanished for a few minutes, bearing in his hand a large empty brown jug, and, upon again making his appearance, it was frothed to the brim with foaming ale. Then his mother dived into a deep cupboard, and from this secret depository produced a black bottle, containing a liquid not publicly swallowed by teetotallers, but administered medicinally in private.

A look of pride illumined the features of Mr. Bumstead as he gazed on the preliminaries; nor was this look less intense from the spur of a sharp appetite.

"Come, gentlemen," said Mrs. Tiggle, when all things were in readiness, "fall to. You're as welcome as the sun in June."

"That's the truth, I know," responded the gamekeeper.

"Ay, there's nothing like truth, Peter,"

added Mr. Bolton, drawing his chair close to the table, and sticking a fork into the breast of the chicken, "there's nothing like truth. Poor old Striver could never bear to hear the truth. I remember the last season but six he ever hallooed to the pack, just about the beginning of it, we were wide of home, and hunting a strange country, when I saw a nasty spear or two fresh planted in the centre of a furze cover. I told Striver of this, and, said I, there'll be mischief here before we get out of it. 'No, there won't,' replied the obstinate old mule. But he felt there would be. Well! in a little time I saw a suspicious trap baited with fresh lamb. I'll de d—d, said I, if there won't be pen-an'-ink presently. 'No, there won't,' growled the old mouse-hunt; but he knew there would, only he was too iron-headed to listen to the gospel. Well! in a few seconds more—Bath buns and buckskin breeches! such a cry rung through the wood; it sounded like the ghost of a hound tasting the brimstone lash. 'Hark to Challenger,' hallooed Striver. It was a hark, indeed!"

said Mr. Bolton, severing the liver-wing from the chicken's body, and poisoning his knife and fork to recount the sequel. "There was as good a hound as ever opened, with his fore-legs in a strong trap, both broken clean above the ancles."

"Forgive us our sins!" exclaimed Peter, who had often caused a similar accident to canine trespassers, and the reminiscence was any thing but pleasing.

"I told you so, said I," continued the old whipper-in; "I knew there'd be trouble, and there'll be more, if we don't shift our ground. 'No there won't,' again growled Striver, looking as black as a starless night, and as blind to the truth as ever. Hardly had I said this, when a gun flashed from the side of the cover, and immediately after it we heard the squire roaring out in a dreadful passion. I haven't known him in one since. We galloped to him, and there lay a fine dog-fox shot clean through the head, close at his feet. What a row there was! and well there might be. Every one looked like a mad dog, and

when I told them of poor Challenger's fate, I thought all would have blown up like gun-powder."

"And who did it?" inquired Jack, when Mr. Bolton paused to dismember a side bone.

"A white-livered farmer, afraid of his wheat," replied Mr. Bolton. "I saw him skulking off; and, giving the view holloa, such a drubbing that poor devil got from twenty whips, I shall never forget. But," added the old whipper-in, gravely, "that wasn't the worst of it."

"What was?" inquired Peter.

"He was found dead as a door-nail the next morning," replied Mr. Bolton, "sticking head foremost in a horse-pond."

"Preserve us!" exclaimed Mrs. Tiggle, horrified. "What, murdered?"

"No," replied Tom, soothingly, "no, no, no, my charming Mrs. Tiggle. The jury sat nine hours upon the body, and, after a patient investigation, as the County Herald described it, they brought in a verdict of, 'It sarved him right.'"

“ A proper one too,” said the gamekeeper.

“ A very proper one.”

“ Who did it ?” inquired Jack.

“ Ah !” exclaimed the old whipper-in, winking his left eye, “ that’s a different cast. Of course, nobody was suspected. Striver wasn’t mentioned. No, no, it wouldn’t have been right. He didn’t ride sly and drive the yelping cur into the mire with the butt-end of his whip. Oh no ! certainly not. But then, d’ye see, he doesn’t like to be told so.”

“ Why not ?” asked the unsophisticated Mrs. Tiggle.

“ Because,” replied Tom, in a lowered voice, and looking cautiously into every nook and corner of the room, “ he can’t bear to *think* of the truth.”

The old Dutch clock, which had tick-tocked for thirty years ’neath Mrs. Tiggle’s hospitable roof, struck the tenth hour before the remnants of the supper were abandoned.

“ There’s a favour I would ask,” said Peter, throwing down his knife and fork, his appetite being more than satiated. “ I’m wonderful bashful, and always was. If, Mr.

Bolton, you'd just mention our case to the squire, instead of me, it would be a mortal respite, I can tell ye."

"I'll do it," replied Tom, burying his nose in the froth of a quart of ale.

"And I, sir," said Jack, "have a —" but here he paused.

"Take a pull at the pot, and at him again," suggested the old whipper-in, offering Jack the foaming beer. "Let your note be full and deep on a right scent. Never hunt back, but hark for'ard, remember."

"I was going to say," recommenced Jack, "if you would get the squire to let me be under you, sir, and learn to become a whipper-in, I'd worship you, Mr. Bolton, boots and all."

Jack's sincerity was portrayed in his undisguised enthusiasm. Every nerve seemed to thrill with interest, as he expressed his desire.

"An ounce of blood's worth a pound of bone," said Tom, giving Jack a thump of encouragement between his shoulders. "Here's breedin' here. None o' your puddle wish-

wash runs in these veins, but clear, out-an'-out, genuine English blood. I always thought so, Mrs. Tiggle."

The mother looked with pride upon the object of Mr. Bolton's praise, and Jack blushed for the first time in his life.

"Give me your hand, my boy," continued Tom. "There, from this hour, you're second whip to the Scourfield hunt. Ride straight to hounds, be respectful to the field, keep a muzzle on your tongue; but when ye halloo, let it be music that'll charm the angels. None o' your thin, penny-trumpet squeaks for me. Let your heart be in your voice, like a true sportman's, full of ardour, strength, and manhood. Striver's cheer was always like a frog-eating Frenchman's. Listen to my son Will's — there's a peal! A Bolton was always celebrated for his cheer," remarked the old whipper-in, with a sparkle of pride flitting in his eyes.

"I'll do nothing but what you tell me, sir," replied the excited Jack, with shadows of scarlet coats, black caps, and leather breeches, dancing in his heated imagination.

“Only to think,” added Mrs. Tiggie, wiping the salt drops of pleasure from her eyes, “my son the second whip. Bless us! What’ll all the neighbours say?”

“That our family’s on the riz,” replied Peter, kicking over a chair in the warmth of his gratification.

“This day month,” said Mr. Bolton, deliberately, “he shall mount the livery. On your wedding-day he shall purple the skirts of a bit of pink for the first time. Yes, on the last day o’ the season. I’ll arrange all these matters with the squire to-morrow.”

“I can never thank you enough, sir,” said Jack, almost melted with emotion.

“The last day,” continued Mr. Bolton, without noticing the observation, “will be, what may be called, your first regular one. It’s my fancy this should be so, that, in after years, you may remember well Tom Bolton, the whipper-in.”

CHAPTER XXIX.

EARLY MORNING—THE EMBRYO WHIPPER- IN—THE PHILOSOPHY OF SCENT.

“ This morning, like the spirit of a youth
That means to be of note, begins betimes.”

NATURE was waking from repose; the sun's rays were bursting from the dewy verdure, like hope's bright hue upon the weeping heart; the spring flowers unclasped their leaves to the cheerful light, with dewdrops sparkling in every cup; the air rang with the songs of birds; and, as Agnes threw open her casement, and regarded the enchanting scene with smiles,

“ Which went, and came, and disappeared
Like glancing sunbeams on the dimpled water,
Shaded by trees,”

she felt a gladness in her heart, long since a stranger to its beating.

“And all will be well,” she said, reading a letter, and afterwards placing it in her bosom; “all will be well at last. Till now, there was a mockery in the sound—the mere echo of despair. But now I feel these words, so often spoken by him, will be realized—the prediction fulfilled. Thank God!”

And, bending her knees, with features upturned to the blue vault of heaven, Agnes breathed a prayer to Him who listens to the holy thanks of the grateful, and is not deaf to the cries of the wretched.

It was very early, and, with the exception of a few domestics, most of the inhabitants of Scourfield Hall were wrapped in easy slumber. Agnes put on a bonnet, and, throwing a shawl over her shoulders, descended the staircase. As she passed the squire’s bed-room, she heard him snoring most lustily, and was half inclined to disturb his sound repose; but, after a moment’s hesitation, she left him in the land of vapoury dreams and shadows of the brain.

A servant, with sleepy eyes and yawning

mouth, stood leaning on her broom in the hall, and seemed to doubt the correctness of her vision, when Agnes appeared, equipped for a morning's walk. The antique massive door swung open, and Agnes hastened towards the flower-garden.

"I wonder where Miss Agnes be a-going to thus early!" soliloquized the domestic. "She's as blithe as a bee, while I'm as drowsy as an owl. If I was a lady-born, would I get up, that's all!"

This sort of self-questioning was followed by the annihilation of a large web, which an incautious spider had woven within reach of the sweeping brush. It hung from an old oak beam, and its intricate meshes were worthy of a cunning lawyer's study. So entangling was the crafty work, so luring the position, that an attorney, however sly, could scarcely have outwitted the spider in spreading a net for his victims.

What difference is there between a spider and an attorney of the general order? The one preys upon insects, the other upon men.

Both live only for the destruction of others. Oh! that a broom would come and sweep them——anywhere; so that we might speak of them as things that had passed away!

Against a grey-mossed wall, the boundary of the flower-garden, an old ivy-plant crept, and spread its twining branches. Far and wide, high and low, this climber of the ruin, and of the seared and hollow oak, sent forth his luxuriant foliage. Among the thick, broad leaves, busy birds were building; and, as if conscious of security, the nimble-winged architects continued their operations, notwithstanding Agnes was a close observer of them. The flapping leaves rustled with the work, and so absorbed was Agnes in watching their movements, that she was unaware of the approach of any one, until a hand lightly fell upon her shoulder. Upon turning quickly round, she saw Wil-mott.

“What, so early!” he exclaimed. “I little thought you could shake off drowsy sleep so soon as this.”

“Then you wronged me in thought,” re-

plied Agnes, smiling. "I not only *can* rise so early, but am partial to it."

"Then why not practise it oftener?" rejoined Wilmott.

"Because I've no companion for my walks," said Agnes. "Kate cannot be persuaded to get up one minute before it's necessary to prepare for breakfast."

"Let us go under her window, and rouse her," responded Wilmott.

"I must tell you first," said Agnes, "I've had another letter from dear Charles. Here it is," she added, giving it to him.

After Wilmott had read the epistle, he exclaimed—

"Heaven be praised! This mystery will at length be cleared. But, is it not strange he should have neglected to inform you of the particulars?"

"No," replied Agnes. "It is so like him. But, from his manner of writing, I am certain all is on the eve of explanation."

"I agree with you," added Wilmott.

“And, as we have done hitherto, we must continue to do—wait patiently for events.”

“Yes,” said Agnes; “and I am certain our patience will not be called upon to endure a much longer trial.”

“May it be so!” responded Wilmott.

Without any further observation being made upon the subject, they proceeded towards the Hall. When within a few yards of Kate’s bed-room window, they stopped suddenly, to listen to the words of a song which came swelling from the opened casement.

“Oh! ’tis lovely to wake at the early hour,
With a heart unclouded by care,
When the dew is kissing the opening flower,
Like a spirit hovering there.

Oh! ’tis lovely to watch the butterfly’s wing
Flitting in the new-born day:
He’s the herald of summer; a careless thing,
Dancing all his life away.

’Tis lovely to hear the song of the bird
Trilling from the hawthorn-tree;—
’Tis as gladsome a sound as on earth is heard—
Warbled from a breast that’s free.

Oh! ’tis lovely to wake,” &c.

“Dear Kate!” said Agnes, as her cousin

finished her song. "How merry and light-hearted she is!"

"May she never be less so than now!" responded Wilmott.

"She is rising, I think," added Agnes.

"I'll throw a pebble at the window to see," said Wilmott.

A small stone was jerked with precision against a pane, and hastily Kate looked out of the window, but as quickly withdrew again. Her toilet was but just begun; a slight dressing-robe only was carelessly folded across her bosom, and her long hair hung dishevelled over her shoulders. A bright flush was upon her cheek, pink and fresh as the bloom of an opening rose. Never did she look more lovely; and, as Wilmott caught a glimpse of her, he thought of pictured Hebe, and other fantastic images of poets' brains.

"Hilloa! you rascals, what are ye about, eh?" said a well-known voice.

Wilmott and Agnes looked towards the quarter whence it came, and there saw the

projected visage of the squire. A white cotton nightcap surmounted his brows, and something like astonishment was depicted upon his features.

"Why it isn't past six, is it?" he inquired.

"No," replied Wilmott and Agnes, in the same breath.

Ah!" rejoined the squire, rubbing his hands with glee, "I thought I couldn't have overslept. No, no, no! I haven't done such a thing for twenty years and more."

"What an ugly nightcap you wear, uncle!" said Agnes, with a merry laugh.

"Ugly, my love!" replied the squire, pulling it up a little, and sticking it on one side. "It's a beauty, I think."

"You certainly display no taste in its arrangement," said Wilmott.

"Nonsense, ye chatterers," responded the squire. "It keeps my head warm, and that's enough for me. But, bless my soul! what's this?"

The squire's expression of astonishment

was caused by the appearance of Jack Tiggles, mounted on one of his old favourite horses, coming at a foot-pace down the park, with Mr. Bolton walking by his side. Jack was dressed in a neat, scarlet coat, black velvet cap, buckskin-breeches and top-boots. A white cravat was tied very neatly round his neck. Tom was the *artiste*, and altogether Jack looked the very essence of a whipper-in. With majestic stateliness they arrived opposite the squire, who cried out,—

“Why, Tom! what’s this about, eh?”

“I’m giving him a lesson, sir,” replied Mr. Bolton; “and, next to Will, he’s the likeliest pupil I’ve ever seen.”

“You’ll spoil him if you talk in that way,” said Wilmott.

“Will I?” responded Tom, significantly, and cracking the thong of his heavy whip. “Sugar and flax is the stuff for the young uns. Spoil him, indeed!” and again the lash snapped in the air.

“Can he halloo?” inquired the squire.

“He could, sir,” replied Mr. Bolton;

“but I think it’s all out of him now; isn’t it, Jack?”

“Yes, sir, I’m hoarser than an old rook,” said Jack, in a deep, cracked voice.

“He’s been at it for an hour,” observed the old whipper-in; “and his lungs must be tough leather to stand that as well as they have!”

“Is he to go with us to-day?” asked the squire.

“No, sir,” replied the old whipper-in. “Next Friday is the time fixed. And, please God, he’ll not look a tailor among us.”

“As you please, Tom, as you please,” said the squire.

“I don’t wish him to go before, sir, for more reasons than one,” continued Mr. Bolton. “He might get into difficulties, which, as I heard a man say, who knew a good deal about difficulties of all sorts—a retired bum, sir—”

“A what?” said the squire.

“A bum, sir,” replied Tom,—“a sheriff’s bum. He said people got into scrapes just

like blind puppies scramble into mire. Head over heels they go plump into 'em, because their eyes ain't open to the danger. Now, this boy, Jack, is but little better than a blind puppy yet ; but," said Mr. Bolton, with much energy, " I'll open his peepers before many days are over, or I'm much mistaken."

" And so you intend he should take your place, I suppose," said Agnes, quizzing the old whipper-in.

" Not while I live, miss," replied Tom, shaking his head—" not while I live. But he shall be ready for the empty saddle when I'm earthed."

" Don't talk in that fashion," said the squire. " When you're run down, *I* shall want breath too, I know."

Kate now joined the party, and, as she gave a hand to Wilmott, she held up the other menacingly, as if to inflict a chastisement.

" You deserve it," she said.

“What for?” asked the squire.

“Pray take off that frightful cap, dear father, and get ready for breakfast,” replied Kate, without noticing the query.

“The order’s obeyed,” rejoined the squire, popping in his head.

“Good morning, Mr. Bolton,” said Kate, approaching the old whipper-in. “I hope your pupil’s efforts are satisfactory.”

“Thank ye, miss,” replied Tom. “His attempts are praiseworthy.”

The lauded object sat in his saddle with the pride of a laurel-crowned hero. His new boots pinched him ; but the pain was scarcely felt. The buckskins were a tight fit, and very uncomfortable ; but he heeded not the annoyance. The cap pressed heavily upon his forehead, and bound his brow as if made of iron ; but the weight was, like the crown to a king, a pleasurable burden.

“I hope you’ll be a good and attentive lad,” said Kate, “and no longer so mischievous, particularly with your intended father-in-law.”

“No, ma’am,” replied Jack, touching his cap; “I’ve promised Mr. Bolton to give up playing the monkey.”

“And he’ll keep it, too, miss, I know,” said Tom.

“I hope so,” added Kate.

“The scent will be good to-day, I think,” observed Wilmott.

“There’s every likelihood for it, sir,” said Tom; “but there’s no accounting for scent. I’ve studied, for many years, to discover the laws by which scent is governed, but can’t make it out to my satisfaction.”

“Still we know a good scenting-day from a bad one,” responded Wilmott.

“We’re aware of effects,” rejoined Mr. Bolton, sagely, “but remain ignorant of causes; as, for instance, a sunshiny day is not good for hunting; but a warm day without sun is generally a perfect one. In some mists scent will lie, in others not at all. During a white frost it’s breast-high, as it also is when frost is quite gone; but, at the time of its going off, scent won’t lie a bit. It scarcely ever lies

with a north or an east wind ; but with a southerly one, and a mild westerly, it will. If you see the dogs rolling about, and the cobwebs hanging upon the bushes, you may be certain of no hunting. 'These you see, sir,' continued Tom, "are points gained from careful observation ; and we can make as sure of their correctness, as the sailor can of the needle heading to the north ; but, at the same time, we're just as blind as to the cause for the effect."

After delivering this philosophic opinion, Mr. Bolton bowed to his auditors, and moved off with Jack.

"A delightful old man," exclaimed Kate "how I like to hear him talk !"

"He's one of the most singular old fellows in the world," said Wilmott ; "but a more honest heart never beat."

"Mr. Titley is very late this morning," observed Kate.

"Say, rather, we are unusually early," replied Kate.

“There’s an old saying,” added Wilmott, smiling, “which admits of a more refined version than the original—that talking of shadows substances appear. See, the object of our attention approaches.”

CHAPTER XXX.

BUTTON AND THE BADGER.

“This night, methinks, is but the daylight sick,
It looks a little paler ; 'tis a day,
Such as the day is when the sun is hid.”

IT was a bright moonlight night, and just nine o'clock, when Striver, accompanied by Button, entered a cover on the margin of the heath. A thick mist was rising, and already the broom and furze were spangled over with the moisture. At each step the trapper took with his dog, they brushed the wet from the boughs, and now and then Button sneezed his dissatisfaction at the prospect of catching cold from this untimely visit.

“You may snuffle, Button,” said his master;
“I don't care for that. If you've been at

work all day, so have I; and if there's more to do, which there is, we must do it."

Button continued to hang his head and tail sulkily, notwithstanding this pithy argument, and tracked his master's footsteps with any thing but his accustomed pleasure.

"You'll alter your tune presently," continued the old trapper, "or I'm amazingly deceived."

Button gave a sharp cry, as much as to inquire the nature of the business they were upon.

"Ah! yes, yes; you want to know all my movements," said Striver; "you're more curious than any old woman."

Button rubbed his head against the legs of his master.

"You may coax all ye like," continued Striver; "but I shan't tell you what I'm about. You'll see in a minute, my boy, and then I expect you'll be brisk enough."

Button anticipated the moment for this nimble display, by pricking up his ears and raising his short tail.

As they entered deeper into the wood, its denizens became frightened at the interlopers. The hare stopped from cropping the bitter weed, and, listening for an instant to make sure that her fears were not groundless, away she scudded to a more secluded spot. The nimble rabbit fled to his burrow with a palpitating heart, and the wood-pigeon rattled from her roost on the wings of fear. From the dark shade of the fir the pheasant peered, and, after the disturbers had passed, he shook his bright plumage, and settled again to rest.

About the centre of the wood, Striver stopped, and looked carefully at the entrance of a large hole dug in the sand. By the light of the moon, he was enabled to see fresh tracks made on the verge of the earth.

“He’s out, Button,” said Striver, exultingly. “Yes, he hasn’t returned,” continued he, looking carefully at the marks in the sand.

The shrewd Button now seemed to comprehend the whole matter. He skipped here and there; placed his nose to the hole, and

suddenly became quite an altered Button. At length, his joy was not confined to silent expression; but, as many an incautious dog has done before him, he ventured to give tongue to those feelings which discretion should have taught him to suppress.

“ Quiet—Flames and flax ! What are ye after ?” said Striver, lifting his foot, and almost inclined to make Button feel the weight of it.

The reproved Button immediately squatted down upon his haunches, and watched his master’s proceedings silently

From under his arm the old trapper produced three sacks, with drawing-strings run through their mouths. With great caution he placed one in the hole, and fixed the end of the string to a convenient stub. A few yards from this earth there was another, but not quite so large. Here he put another sack just in the same manner.

“ I couldn’t find any more this morning,” soliloquised Striver; “ but there must be another somewhere; they always have three, at the very least. Where can the other be ?”

Scarcely had the old trapper delivered himself of this query, when suddenly he fell backwards into a luxuriant furze-bush. The long sharp prickles made sad havoc with Striver's flesh ere he could rise from his recumbent posture, and, with muttered curses, he rubbed the wounds, and, between smiles and frowns, discovered that the third earth, secreted among some thick broom, was the cause of his tumble.

"A lucky fall, Button; a lucky fall!" said Striver, pushing the last sack into the hole, and tying the string as he had done the others.

The ardent Button perceived the preliminary arrangements were complete. He stood with restless eye and quivering nostrils, curbed impatience swelling every vein. Like a crouched tiger, he waited for the moment to spring and hunt his victim down.

Striver saw, with pride, the willingness of his favourite. A smile separated the old man's lips as, with folded arms, he looked at Button for a few moments, ere he gave the

desired signal. Stooping down, he caressed the eager animal, and whispered, "Softly, Button; softly, my boy." And, after a short pause, he waved his hand, and said, "Hold up."

Away rushed Button. Through furze and broom, bush and briar, the dog crashed. With his nose bent to the earth, Button pursued the badger's track, but gave no tongue as he hunted on; and, within a few brief seconds, Striver lost all sounds of the pursuer. On a clear wind, and in a listening attitude, the old trapper stood. He grasped a thick ashen stick, and kept his eyes fixed on the hole in which he had placed the first sack.

"He 'll make for that, I think," whispered he.

Now was the reign of silence. In the thick, deep wood not a sound was to be heard. The dazzling moonbeams streamed upon the earth, and stole in silver streaks between the mingling branches of the grove. A thick mist hung like a bridal veil upon tree and flower, shading, but not concealing, the co-

vered charms. The wind was hushed like a child at rest ; scarcely a young leaf flapped in his gentle breath. It was a night for lovers to love in.

“ Hist,” said Striver, to himself, as a slight noise caught his watchful ear, and, kneeling, he bent it to the ground to listen with greater facility. Again the sound was heard, and the trapper rising, and bending forwards, seemed to anticipate a speedy view of the badger. Now a rustling was plainly heard ; on it came closer and closer. In the stillness of the night, boughs and twigs cracked and snapped, as if animals of larger growth than Button and the badger were making their way through them.

At last, within three yards of where Striver was standing, the badger appeared, closely followed by Button. The trapper made a blow at the fugitive as he passed him, but he missed his aim. The gallant Button, however, was more successful. His victim was diving into the sack, when the dog seized him by his loose skin, and flung him back several

feet. The badger turned to the bite, and snapped his teeth through Button's shoulder. Over and over they rolled. Striver rushed to the rescue, and tried to inflict a deadly blow upon the enemy; but the struggles of the two were so great, that he dared not risk the chance of injuring Button. The badger, in his usual way, had thrown himself upon his back, and with his sharp claws and teeth was inflicting deep gashes in poor Button's body. With a hearty good-will, the courageous Button retaliated, by clutching his enemy by the throat, and shaking him with more than his natural strength.

"He'll kill him — I know he will," said Striver, in a woful voice, and seizing Button by the tail, he lifted him up by this ornamental member, in order to get a fair blow at the badger. The attempt was futile; Button was not to be drawn off by his tail. With a strong and sudden twist he disengaged his master's hold, and, with a loud, angry growl, sent his teeth deeper into his victim's wind-pipe.

Nails and grinders the badger used vigorously ; but the firm hold of Button upon his throat began to weaken him. He blew up his skin, and, by every manœuvre, tried to loosen the gripe ; but Button knew too well for him the importance of sticking to that tender spot.

What shall I do ? ” exclaimed Striver ; “ he’ll kill him—I know he will. You’re not a match for him, Button, I tell ye ; it’s a heavy weight against a light un.”

Button, however, was of a different opinion. He discovered, sooner than his master, that his enemy was getting the worst of it, and renewed his exertions in the deadly conflict. From countless veins in Button’s body, the blood streamed in crimson currents, while very little flowed from the badger. But, as no doubt the experienced Button wisely thought, it is better in fighting to lose blood than breath. The thick skin of the badger prevented his arteries from being opened ; but it afforded no protection to the loss of his wind, which momentarily became worse. Af-

ter some very violent struggles, to which Striver fruitlessly endeavoured to put a speedy end, the animals lay motionless, held down by each other's jaws.

"They're both dead," sobbed Striver, who was about catching up Button, when a waspish growl informed him of the error of his conjecture.

The bloody feud recommenced. Button placed his fore-paws upon the neck of his enemy, and literally stretched the windpipe from his throat. Still the badger was not beaten. He continued to carve deep gashes with his claws, and made his strong teeth meet as he varied his bite in poor Button's carcase. Not once did the cunning dog change his gripe. He knew victory depended upon retaining hold of his enemy's throat, and there he held him with the firmness of a screwed vice.

At length the badger became exhausted. His struggles became fainter, and, as he lay almost breathless, Striver watched an opportunity to inflict a stunning blow upon his

head. The defeated animal opened his clasped jaws, and permitted one of Button's mangled feet to drop from between them. For this act of lenity Button returned a vigorous shake, and, finding no farther renewal of the fray by his opponent, he released his teeth from their tough duty, and shook himself for refreshment.

"Stop a bit, Button," said Striver, "I'll finish him."

Blow after blow was repeated upon the badger from Striver's cudgel, till at last no signs of life remained. Then the trapper seized Button, who was industriously engaged in licking his wounds, and, holding him in his arms, he carefully examined the bleeding injuries. Numerous and deep they proved, and tears swam in the old man's eyes as he perceived one of his favourite's feet was lamentably crushed.

"You'll limp for life," said the trapper; "and may I be flayed alive if I wouldn't prefer being lame than seeing you so!"

Button, notwithstanding his pain, wagged his tail at this expressed affection from his master.

“Lie there till I take up the sacks,” said Striver, pulling off his coat and spreading it on the ground as a bed for Button. “We must get home as soon as we can, to dress your wounds, poor fellow.”

The sacks were soon taken from the earths, and the body of the badger placed in one of them. Throwing it over one shoulder, Striver lifted Button under his arm, and took his way homewards.

“You must have a dip in the river, Button, although it is cold,” said the trapper, as Button’s blood trickled down his fingers. “There’s nothing like a running stream for a flesh wound.”

Proceeding towards the bank of the river, which was not far off, Striver continued to caress and talk to his dog.

“I’ll have a new cap made of this warmint’s skin,” said he, “and when I hear ’em talk of dogs’ pluck, Button, I’ll show it to them, and relate the fight you had to-night, my boy. You were a wonder from your infancy. I recollect you bit a kitten’s tail off before you

were two months old ; and when the old woman that owned her threw you into a pond for doing it, you scrambled out again, and yapped at her afterwards. I said then you'd be a wonder, and so you are."

Coming to the stream, Striver picked out a convenient spot, and laved the body and limbs of his favourite. In the moonlit water Button was placed with as much gentleness as if he had been a tender child. His sores were cleaned, and from his sleek skin all stains of gore removed. With a fevered tongue he lapped the clear water, and soon became much refreshed. After wiping him with his handkerchief, Striver wrapped his coat about Button to shield him from the cold, and continued his road towards home.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE HUNTSMAN'S BIRTHRIGHT.

“ May he live
 Longer than I have time to tell his years!
 Ever belov'd and loving—
 And, when old Time shall lead him to his end,
 Goodness and he fill up one monument.”

“ THIS is my birthday,” cries the infant, as he wakes from his sleep. Smiles dimple his plump, rosy cheeks as he thinks of grand-mamma's present. Away he bounds from his little cot, and in another moment is clasped in a young loving mother's arms. With what rapture she presses her boy, her only boy, to her fond bosom! Kiss after kiss is printed upon his lips, and, as she craves a blessing for him, she feels in that brief moment the ecstasy of years.

“ This is my birthday,” says the old man. Sorrowfully he shakes his few bleached locks, and thinks of former years long since passed away. Well he remembers his truant school-boy tricks. Again he rambles in the vale with his heart’s first chosen one. By his side she listens to his tale of love, breathed in words which sink deep into her breast. Once more he is surrounded by the companions of his youth ; their merry shouts ring in his ears, and their laugh is echoed in his memory. But where are they all ? Alas ! the old man is alone.

It was on a rough, boisterous night, the fourteenth of March, that William’s cottage contained more inmates than were ever before assembled within its walls at any one time. At a round table sat Mr. Bolton, playing “ all fours ” with Mrs. Tiggles, while the attentive Peter watched her cards and scored the board. Most of the domestics from the Hall, with William and Fanny, were arranging themselves for a country dance ; while the village fiddler, mounted on an

empty flour-tub in a corner of the room, was tuning, "Singing Sukey." Striver was placed in the easy chair close to the fire, with the maimed Button couched upon his knees. At a side table Jack was fully occupied in carving slices from a large ham. Whether his knife slipped occasionally, cannot be ascertained with any degree of precision; but, certain it is, that now and then a tit-bit of lean, of convenient proportions, fell upon the dish, and was no sooner there than it was conveyed to Jack's epicurean palate. Gouty Bob, the butler, was mixing some potent beverage in a wide and deep china bowl. From time to time he sipped a spoonful of the fragrant drink, and, after adding a lump or two of sugar, then, giving another gentle squeeze of the lemon, and popping in a shaving more of lime, he smacked his lips, and patted those regions surgically described as abdominal.

"It'll do, Jack," said Bob.

"I don't believe it," responded Jack.

Now, if some extraordinary convulsion of nature had suddenly lifted the roof from Bob's

head, and exposed the blinking, twinkling stars, in place of the whitewashed ceiling, Bob could not have evinced greater astonishment. To doubt the quality of his palate—it was sacrilege; to question his opinion of punch—it was felony.

It was some time before the butler could resolve on what steps to take for revenging this foul affront. If the punch-bowl had been deep enough, there can be little doubt Jack would have been drowned in good liquor, as a certain royal personage was treated in the “good old days,” when men wore swords as wasps do stings. But, as this was not the case, Bob determined upon a more pleasant mode of vindicating his honour. Filling a round, fat-looking glass with the abused composition, he offered it to Jack, saying,

“Drink that. Let it rest in your throat as if it was a mile long, and then confess yourself an unbelieving, miserable specimen of a know-nothing.”

Jack obeyed the instructions faithfully. When he had done so, with a very equivocal

expression of modesty, he eyed the butler shrewdly, and said, "Mr. Bob, I am."

Bob was satisfied.

The fiddler flourished his bow; all were ready, and off they went, to as merry a tune as ever was scraped from catgut.

"Trip it lightly," said Tom; "we'll join ye presently. High, low, Jack, and the game, ma'am," continued he, pegging the score.

"I wish I could dance as well as you, sir," said Peter. "You're a capital one at it."

"I'm obliged for your praise," replied Mr. Bolton, with the smile of a flattered courtier. "But in the beginning, Peter," added he, "you were never designed for a dancer."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mrs. Tigger.

"Providence models his creatures for especial and various purposes," continued Mr. Bolton. "The blood-horse is formed for speed; the cart-horse for strength; the fox-hound possesses fine powers of smell; the gaze-hound great quickness of sight: and so on, throughout the links of the animal creation."

“How I like to hear him talk!” ejaculated Peter.

“But why isn’t Mr. Bumstead suited for dancing?” inquired Mrs. Tiggie.

“Because, ma’am,” replied Tom, in a suppressed voice, “he’s much too leady in the stern.”

Peter blushed at the mention of this disqualification, and heartily wished dame Nature had shaped him for “the poetry of motion; and, while Mr. Bolton gallantly led Mrs. Tiggie to the dance, he shuffled up the abandoned cards, and, snapping the ends quickly through his fingers, seemed to be giving vent to some partly smothered feelings of chagrin.

On the white-sanded floor the party shuffled, whirled, and skipt, with light heels and lighter hearts. A new spring was given to the dance when the old whipper-in joined it. He twisted his heavy partner here and there; between the filed line he galloped her up and down, until the rubicund countenance of Mrs. Tiggie became of the melting order.

“You’re out of wind, ma’am,” said Mr.

Bolton, considerately. "And, if truth must be told, I'm panting a little."

"You'd better sit, my dear Mrs. T," whispered Peter, "or I fear you'll become too moist."

"Thank'e, Mr. Bumstead, I will," replied Mrs. Tiggle, with her most winning look at the ensnared gamekeeper.

"Don't, pray don't," said Peter, beseechingly, "or them looks 'll singe me into ashes."

Mrs. Tiggle smiled at the compliment, and swallowed a large glass of punch which Peter handed to her.

The inspiring strains from the fiddle ceased, while all partook of Bob's matchless mixture. From Mr. Bolton to the fiddler, who were the highest and the most humble there, in the butler's opinion, he regarded each as the glass was taken from his lips. When Tom refilled his goblet immediately after emptying it, and gave his customary demonstrative smack of satisfaction, Bob rubbed his knees and chuckled with delight.

"It's as rich as oil, Mr. Bolton, isn't it?"

said Bob. "It hangs about a man's mouth like honey in a comb. A man couldn't die with that in his mouth," continued the enthusiastic butler. "It would keep his body and soul together even against his will."

"Hush! Bob, hush!" replied the old whipper-in, reprovingly; "we mustn't discuss religious subjects here."

Half an hour had just elapsed, and most appeared to have recovered from their exertions, when William desired the fiddler to stick some fresh rosin on his bow, and strike music from the tightened string.

"Come, Striver," said the young huntsman, "give over nursing Button, and join us in a fling."

"No, William, no," replied the trapper; "my dancing days are over."

"You won't refuse me as a partner," said Fanny, who wore as pretty little caps now she was a wife as previous to her marriage—a rule not invariably adopted by ladies in the holy state of matrimony.

"A corpse would do his best, ma'am, if

axed by you," replied Striver, displacing Button from his knees, and joining Mrs. Bolton in the dance.

"There's a merry set," said Tom to Peter, as he watched the dance, seated in a snug place quite out of the way, with some very substantial and excellent viands placed on a table before them.

"It does one's heart good to see 'em," replied the gamekeeper, carving a large slice from a thick round of beef. "I could look at 'em for ever."

It is questionable to which Peter alluded, the refreshments or the dancers; but, as he gazed only upon the beef when he delivered the observation, the former appeared to be the engrossing subject to which he referred.

That "Time flies fast," every body says and sings; but when does he fly so fast as at a revel like the one we are now assisting at in fancy? He loiters idly with his scythe when mowing the unsightly weeds in the choked path of life: but when he comes to a gay flower, with what pleasure the old fellow whets his edge,

and severs it from the root ! He is the curer of all evils, because the destroyer of all created things. Joys and sorrows — pleasures and pains — he obliterates them all from the sensitive nerve, and the susceptible brain. The most fragile and the most lasting works of man are equally breathed upon by Time, and become as if they had never been.

The night was far advanced before the dance was deserted. Between the gusts of the boisterous wind which howled outside, a few strokes from the hall-clock were heard, when William said,

“ We are creeping into the early hours, my friends ; let us try the contents of my wife’s larder by way of a wind up.”

Again the ready Bob was desired to fill the punch-bowl. Crowding round the table, the guests partook of the good cheer provided. Mr. Bolton hob-an’-nobbed with every body ; he kissed his daughter-in-law, and threatened Mrs. Tiggles with a similar infliction, which caused a convulsive twitching in Peter’s features.

“ Do you feel stiff in the joints, Striver ? ” inquired Mr. Bolton.

“ No, sir,” replied the trapper ; “ but as lissim as a fitchew.”

“ Well said,” rejoined Tom. “ Fill a bumper ; you’re as blithe as a cock lark. I mean, too, that bumpers should be filled all round,” added he.

The glasses were filled to the brim as directed, and, as the old whipper-in rose, voices were silenced, and all noise ceased.

“ My friends,” commenced Tom, “ this is my son Will’s birthnight, and I think you’ll agree with me, few nights of our lives have been spent more agreeably. Just about this time,” said Mr. Bolton, pulling from his fob a thick silver watch, and gazing with a smile upon its dial, “ seven an’ twenty years ago Will was hatched. When I was told that I was a father, a warm spark seemed to glow internally, never felt by me before, and from that moment it has never been extinguished. It may have been the glowworm spark of pride ; and if it was, my friends, the cause

was sufficient for the effect, for, of all the plump, fat babbies I ever heard of, Will beat 'em all to shavings."

Loud applause and laughter interrupted Mr. Bolton's progress.

"Silence! silence!" hallooed Tom, good-humouredly waving his hand.

"Silence!" roared Jack, seconding Mr. Bolton's request.

"He was, indeed," continued the old whipper-in. "I looked at his legs first, when he was presented to me wrapped up in one of the late Mrs. Bolton's flannel petticoats, and saw at once Nature had blessed him with well-shaped shins for embracing a horse's ribs. 'He's born to ride well,' said I to Striver there, who was present at the time; and my words were proved true before I expected. He was n't four year old when the squire saw the young care-nought climb upon the back of a yearling, and ride him about the park like the wind, until the colt dropped from exhaustion. As in duty bound, I scolded Will for doing it; but may I be

whipped if I didn't feel prouder of him for this act than many a better one since! Like all young fellows of his kidney—and I don't disguise it from his wife—he was a little too fond of courting the lasses; but it was his only fault that I could discover. And, although I'm his father, I say, without fear of contradiction, a better son, taking him all in all, a parent was never blest with. To have allowed somebody else to propose the toast I'm about to give ye, might, perhaps, have been more in accordance with stiff-necked rules. But, as *we* are not governed by any such vapourish humbug, I beg to propose the long life, health, happiness, and prosperity of my son Will, the squire's huntsman. May he have many returns of this night!"

Long before Mr. Bolton had arrived at the climax of his speech, his auditors were impatient to give scope to their enthusiasm. The hurrah which burst from every tongue drowned the noise of the raging wind without. On the keen blast the sound was carried, and echo

answered it far away from the scene of festive mirth.

It was whispered in the village, but never absolutely authenticated, that, on this memorable night, Mr. Bolton was *assisted* to bed by Peter Bumstead and Jack Tiggle.

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